

TWO FOR ONE: THE “CUTTING UP” TREND

APARTMENT MODERNIZATION IN 1930s MANHATTAN

by

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Introduction

The April 29, 1939, issue of the *New Yorker* magazine carried a small cartoon by Richard Taylor on the bottom of the first page of the book review section.¹ It depicts a man and a woman, both wearing jaunty hats, standing in front of a sign advertising the availability of one-, one-and-a-half-, and two-room apartments. They are shown in conversation with the building's doorman. The cartoon's caption reads "We'd like to look at your one-and-a-half-room apartments." (See fig. 1.)

In 2007, the humor in the caption would be almost completely lost on most readers. There is nothing extraordinary or funny about the idea of renting one-and-a-half-room apartments, even to people nicely dressed in hats. In New York City in 2007, a one-and-a-half-room apartment would likely be considered a "large studio," a one-bedroom that might have an additional nook in which to place a home office, besides the separate bathroom and cramped cooking facilities also implied by the term.²

Although these types of apartments may seem common in New York City today, as they have certainly since the mid-twentieth century, in 1939 the idea of living in such small quarters was still taking some getting used to for the wealthy. But it clearly was happening often enough to make it the subject of the *New Yorker's* brand of wry humor.

The creation of an apartment with only one-and-a-half rooms would likely have been the result of a what the *New Yorker* writer Helen Hokinson, a frequent contributor to

the *New Yorker*'s "Apartments" column called, in a 1936 article, a "cutting-up."³ Cutting-up or apartment subdivision was a real estate trend that dominated the industry in New York City, especially Manhattan, during the decade from 1930 through 1939, and it is the subject of this thesis.

The coming pages will discuss the results of an investigation into the cutting-up phenomenon, apartment subdivision and alteration, also referred to as "apartment modernization" during this period. The trend involved the alteration of the layouts of apartments usually built during the first twenty years of the twentieth century in order to make two or even three apartments out of what had once been a single unit. Usually this work was accompanied by the upgrading of the kitchens and bathrooms, as well as sometimes changes to the mechanicals of the building.

This analysis draws on articles that ran in the real estate, building management, and architecture trade publications of the era, the text as well as the advertising copy, and on the limited discussion of this phenomenon in newspaper and magazine articles of the 1930s. Research was also conducted at the Municipal Archives in lower Manhattan, where microfilmed apartment alteration applications are housed.⁴

Answers to most of my questions were found in the records of the period, though additional "finds" might at some point change some of my conclusions. The following are the key questions answered in this thesis:

How common was the practice of subdividing larger apartments?

What were the reasons, underlying and stated, for this wave of alterations?

What era of buildings and which neighborhoods were likely to have buildings that had been subdivided?

Who planned and executed the changes?

How likely were the owners to have been banks and other lending institutions rather than individual owners?

Was there a correlation between the price and the particular architectural firms that were engaged in this alteration work?

How did building owners pay for the alterations?

Was the alteration phenomenon commonly discussed outside real estate circles?

Was the fact that apartments were altered or modernized ever the substance of the advertising pitch used to attract renters to a particular building?

Obviously this investigation could not help but prompt musings as to whether contemporary real estate trends, such as infill development or the creation of spa-like medical office suites, are similarly reflected in equivalent trade and popular publications of the present period. Which present-day residential trends could a student at a later date successfully trace through reading contemporary publications? The current promotion of Sub-Zero refrigerators, Viking stoves, and Miele washers in condominiums? The changing ratio of condos to coops in Manhattan? Or the “small room perfect for home office” that is frequently advertised today?

The trend of alteration turns out to have a great deal of ink devoted to it in the trade publications of the thirties. It is possible from reading those magazines to get at least the official industry view of what was going on. But the trend did not attract the attention of a wider public and so remains almost forgotten today. It gets little more than a mention in 2007, when real estate agents take potential buyers through apartments in neighborhoods like the Upper West Side, where many odd layouts indicate that the current spaces are not original.

But in the neighborhoods in which it happened, particularly the Upper West Side, Morningside Heights, and parts of Washington Heights and Harlem, it made a significant difference. The cutting up trend changed the size and layout of many of the apartments in those neighborhoods, and in doing so, changed the lives of generations of people who would occupy those apartments in that they lived in, and perhaps came to expect to live in, smaller, less grand spaces.

1. Cartoon by Richard Taylor, *New Yorker*, April 29, 1939, 120.

2. The meaning of “studio apartment” beginning in the late 1920s, when it no longer referred to a high-ceilinged space where artists or aspiring and often wealthy bohemians would live, was “a small apartment of four or fewer rooms.” From Robert A. M. Stern, Gregory Gilmartin, and Thomas Mellins, *New York 1930: Architecture and Urbanism between the Two World Wars* (New York: Rizzoli, 1937), 420.

3. Helen Hokinson, “Apartments: High and Low,” *New Yorker*, September 12, 1936, 89–93.

4. The apartment alteration applications for Manhattan considered and noted were for buildings labeled Class A Tenements, also called Class A Multiple Dwellings or sometimes Apartment buildings. I ignored applications to enlarge the apartments in tenements, largely on the Lower East Side, which was also an apartment alteration trend of the era. I also tended to discount applications where the alteration was for just a single unit in a larger building.

Chapter 1: Apartment Living

Affluent New Yorkers had not long been apartment dwellers when apartment subdivision became the rage, during the 1930s. Apartment living, as opposed to living in single-family houses, only truly took off as a real estate trend in New York City in the late 1890s, although construction on the first middle-class multiple-unit dwellings had started twenty years earlier. In the early years, apartment living was often viewed with skepticism by these wealthier classes. It was considered socially inappropriate to live in close proximity to others. It was thought of as a style of living that should be left to the poor, who could not afford to live any other way.

But by 1893, *King's Handbook of New York* noted that more than half the middle-class population of Manhattan lived in apartment houses, and that by this time “apartment life is popular and to a certain extent fashionable.”¹ While in 1876, there were only about 200 apartment buildings total that had been built in New York City, by 1910 there were more than 10,000.²

The trend grew out of necessity. In 1790, New York had a population of about 33,000. A wave of immigration in the 1840s and 50s increased Manhattan's population fifteenfold, to over 515,000. A decade later, the population had grown by another 50% to 805,651. In 1910, Manhattan had 2.5 million residents.³ Then and now, the space limitations imposed by Manhattan's island geography was key—the population grew but the size of the island did not. The increasing demand for housing made land prices rise,

so affordable multiple dwellings soon supplanted expensive individual houses for all but the very richest Manhattanites.

One of Manhattan's first middle-class apartment buildings, erected in 1873, was the Stuyvesant Apartments, a building at 142 East Eighteenth Street, designed by an emerging influential architect of the period, Richard Morris Hunt. Hunt had studied in Paris, where apartment living had existed for decades, and he adapted the ideas from France to a form that the more prudish New York society would find acceptable. In order to minimize contact between residents and between servants and residents, he built two staircases. The building was also designed to appear as if it was a series of row houses rather than one integrated building.⁴

Apartment building construction took a hiatus when funds ran out because of the economic panic of 1873, but in the 1880s more buildings were constructed, some for New York's upper classes, including the Dakota on Seventy-second Street and Central Park West and the Chelsea on West Twenty-third Street, (which was originally an apartment building, despite the fact that it became a hotel in 1905).

Although the Stuyvesant did not use elevators, an elevator had already been installed in a multiple-unit dwelling in 1871, two years before the Stuyvesant was built.⁵ The convenience of an elevator was one of a number of novel features that would be included in the construction of many of buildings that came after the Stuyvesant, particularly from the 1880s onwards.

Over the next twenty years, as more of these multiple-unit dwellings were erected, architects began to experiment with layouts as well as with room orientation, learning to maximize light through the inclusion of inner courtyards and light courts, and to rearrange the space to separate public from private spaces, which allowed residents to reach rooms by walking down a central hallway instead of passing through one room to reach another.

The type of apartments that were cut up in the 1930s tended to be the pre–World War One apartments, built for the most part between 1900 and 1918, on Park Avenue, a few on Riverside Drive and West End Avenue, and many on the cross streets. These apartments tended to be large by today’s standards. They had six to twelve rooms, including one or two servants’ rooms clustered around the kitchen area, often forming a wing of the apartment. The rooms in these apartments, which would be considered large today, were usually laid out along long hallways, giving the apartments a rambling quality.

One building that was cut up during the 1930s was 509 Cathedral Parkway, near Columbia University, designed by Schwartz & Gross, on the cross street 110th Street, between Broadway and Amsterdam Avenue. The building was designed in a U shape, with a court to the street separating the two sides of the U. Each side of the U had two apartments, thus in total there were four apartments to a floor. (See fig. 2.) These apartments had three public rooms—a living room, a dining room, and a library situated near the entrance to each apartment. The apartment had an entranceway that was fairly

small not only by today's standards but also by the standards of the 1930s when they were subdivided. The apartment was laid out along the spine of a long and somewhat bending hallway. It had three bedrooms, two of which faced directly onto the street. There was also a servant's bedroom and bathroom behind the kitchen.⁶

The succession of living room, dining room, and library was also part of the layout of two Riverside Drive buildings from the era, the Grinnell and the Riviera, which faced each other across 157th Street. The Riviera, also called 790 Riverside Drive, designed by Rouse & Goldstone, was built in 1910 and remodeled in 1938. (See fig. 3.) Its apartments were similarly laid out along a long hallway, with the bedrooms or chambers lying at the end of the hallway, away from the main entrance. A servants' wing existed off the kitchen, with a maid's room, and in the "E" line, two maids' rooms, or a maid's room and a butler's room. A butler's pantry connected the kitchen and maid's room area to the dining room, providing a hallway that did not require contact between the servants and the chief tenants. Similarly, all the apartments contained separate servant entrances to allow for movement in and out of the apartment without contact between the staff and their employers. The building also had four elevators, and it would have been possible for servants and primary tenants to have ridden separate elevators although there is no evidence that this occurred.

The Grinnell (see fig. 4), which was also called 800 Riverside Drive, designed by the firm of Schwartz & Gross, was laid out around a central building courtyard, which was shaped like a triangle with squared-off ends. The apartments themselves, which were

between six and nine rooms in size, were laid out along long and bending hallways, and tended to have angled foyers at the entry point. It is worth noting that the public rooms were often not grouped directly together the way they were in the Riviera. The dining room in some of the apartment lines was clustered with the kitchen and servants' quarters, and the parlor and library lay on the other side of the internal hallway. The layout seems to suggest a progression. First, the family could eat closest to the servants, who would have been assisting in the presentation of the meal, and then they could retire across the hallway to a more private social space, away from the noise of the kitchen. Some apartments had more than one room for servants.

A small number of buildings were built as great squares surrounding courtyards. Some examples of this style were the Apthorp, on Seventy-ninth Street and Broadway, and the Graham Court, on 117th Street and Seventh Avenue, which was also built by the Astor family. Another one of these great courtyard residential structures was the Belnord at Eighty-sixth Street and Broadway, which for a short time was the largest residential building in the world.⁷

The Apthorp (see fig. 5), designed by the firm of Clinton & Russell, and built in 1908, contained ten apartments per floor, accessible from four elevator halls. The Apthorp was laid out with less attention to public and private space divisions than the 509 Cathedral Parkway or the two Riverside Drive buildings mentioned so far. The parlor and dining room were either side by side, or faced each other across a hallway, and the servant's quarters were next to the kitchen. The bedrooms were directly in the line of

sight from the public rooms, and in some cases shared a wall. Both bedrooms and public spaces had the street view, as well as the courtyard view, without a clear logic for the orientation. The foyers in the Apthorp were relatively large and gave a grander sense of entry than the long hallways that greeted visitors to either the Grinnell or the Riviera.

The Dorset (see fig. 6), on 150 West Seventy-ninth Street between Amsterdam and Columbus Avenue on a major two-way cross street, was built like a sideways letter H. Erected in 1910, designed by Schwartz & Gross, known for their many speculative apartment houses particularly on the west side of Manhattan, the building was altered in 1937 by the firm of Boak & Paris, also known also for their speculative apartment houses as well as other structures such as movie theaters. Each floor had two apartments, lying side-by-side going east-west. The easterly apartment, closer to Columbus Avenue, had an interior staircase off a space marked as “private hall.” Each of these apartments had both a 7 x 17 foyer, and a “reception room,” which was almost twice as wide as the foyer. Off the reception room lay the living room, which in turn opened into a dining room. It was also possible to walk out of the foyer in the opposite direction to the reception room into a hallway that led to the maid’s room and bathroom, a kitchen, and a second maid’s room tucked behind the kitchen. The family bedrooms were found along a “private hallway” off the same space that led to the kitchen. There were three bedrooms or “chambers,” one with a bathroom within a private hallway off the master bedroom. On the easterly side, the bedrooms were up a flight of stairs, over the public rooms. All the rooms, including bathrooms, were very generously proportioned.

Housing fashions grew out of changing building codes that dictated details, such as the height of the building, and also out of experience with the medium. But they were also driven by the market. Affluent people needed to be convinced that if they were giving up the privacy and comfort of single-family houses, they would gain other living features that couldn't be had when living "alone." They needed to see that apartment living was more economical and convenient because the number of servants required to maintain an apartment was smaller than the number needed for a private house.

Potential renters also needed to be wooed with a variety of luxuries, such as rooms much larger than those in narrow single-family dwellings. Duplexes made residents feel like they were living in a house, not an apartment. Public spaces, like lobbies, were decorated in a grand manner, with marble-clad walls, stone benches, and iron detailing on railings. The exterior details, including carriage drives and ornate carvings on the outsides of apartment buildings, helped convince the public that these new multiple dwellings really had something special to offer.

Apartment dwellers of the late nineteenth and turn of the twentieth century could often also enjoy certain common features such as a central dining room or common state-of-the-art laundry facilities, which were the kinds of amenities that they would likely not have if they lived in a private house. Technological advances, from central vacuum cleaning to dishwashers, at first only existed on a scale appropriate for large commercial operations—to use a contemporary computer analogy, they were the mainframe version, and not the desktop consumer models. Therefore, these labor-saving devices were never

installed in individual houses, but they could be enjoyed if one lived in an apartment.⁸

These features were novel and were particularly attractive to women, who then, and in the 1930s, were recognized as the leading influence on whether or not a rental contract would get signed.⁹

The installation of subway lines in 1904 opened new neighborhoods to the development of apartment houses, on the west side moving northward up the subway lines, bringing large buildings to Morningside Heights and Washington Heights. It also caused land values to rise on the Upper West Side, resulting in the increased construction of apartment buildings on major thoroughfares like West End Avenue, which had once been populated predominantly with row houses. This construction wave stopped with America's entry into World War One and the depression that occurred immediately afterwards. But then a new wave of apartment construction took off, with somewhat different esthetics and layouts than the pre-World War One form. An introductory paragraph in a 1926 book of architectural plans from across the United States called *American Apartment Houses of Today* stated new stylistic preferences, particularly for simpler exteriors:

The design must be simple in the extreme, inconspicuous but dignified, in good taste, and above all else, well built . . . Banish frills and fussy elaborations, and retain only the fundamentals . . . This is due to the fact that the tenant does not look at the apartment house as he would at his own house: one tenant may have a very decided preference for one style, another for another.¹⁰

The buildings built pre-World War One, were of course, replete with gargoyles, cartouches, grillework and other “fussy elaborations.”

The explosion of the 1920s economy led to a heated construction market in apartment dwellings. That market reached its acme in 1926.¹¹ Many of these 1920s apartments, particularly middle-class Upper West Side apartments, were smaller than the apartments that had dominated the market before World War One. But maid's rooms and dining rooms were still being built—certainly the twenties was the era in which the “classic 6,” one of the coveted staple forms of the Upper West Side real estate market today, was invented. A classic six contains a dining room and maids' rooms (and two other bedrooms, usually two bathrooms, one off the master bedroom, one freestanding in a hallway, plus a half bath off the maid's room.) But even these apartments are often much more compact and less meandering than the ones built before World War One. There were rarely butler's pantries, and even though service doors were common, the service wing of the apartment was less accentuated in the layouts. The public rooms were often smaller than those in the pre–World War One buildings, although the bedrooms were sometimes larger than their earlier counterparts.

During this period, there were also many smaller units built that had “breakfast nooks” and dining alcoves off the kitchen and no dining room at all.¹² While in the pre–World War One era, even some one-bedroom apartments were built with a dining room and servant's room, since even a bachelor was seen to need room to entertain and to house his servant, in the 1920s that degree of comfort in accommodations went out of fashion.

The twenties also saw the construction of smaller units in areas closer to the Midtown business district, such as the Tudor City complex in Manhattan's East Midtown, taking up two blocks from East Forty-first to Forty-third streets. Tudor City was at least promoted as housing that allowed people to walk to work. In an era of cheaper automobiles, magazines suggested that people should maintain dual residences, one in the country and a pied-à-terre in the city, and Tudor City could offer businessmen and professionals that urban anchor. The number of people who made use of the luxury of this dual residence arrangement is not known.

By the end of the twenties, whether people lived in ten rooms or six, New York had become a city of apartment dwellers. Even during the headier moments of excessive 1920s spending, developers did not return to building speculative single-family houses even for the wealthy. They were building apartments, sometimes luxurious, but multiple-family dwellings.

Looking back on that market in an interview in January 1931, after the stock market had collapsed and America was plunged into a financial panic worse than it had ever seen before, the real estate baron Douglas Elliman tried to argue that investment in real estate was in fact one of the more stable investments that had been possible during the economic boom years of the 1920s.

The great criticism of the banking fraternity is, and has been, that real estate is not liquid and therefore a poor security. Had it been liquid, it might have been subject to short selling, which undoubtedly would have created in the real estate field the same abnormal situation that exists in more liquid securities, namely that of selling far below their intrinsic worth.”¹³

But despite Elliman's protest, the Wall Street Crash of 1929 did have serious repercussions in the real estate industry. The weakness in the American economy, some of which had been masked but had existed before the crash, resulted in a spiraling series of difficult conditions: massive unemployment, reduced consumer spending, and social unrest. In the decade that followed the crash, there were unusually high vacancy rates, many foreclosures, and a generally soft residential market. It was in this environment that the alteration trend took hold.

1. *King's Handbook of New York*, quoted in Robert A. M. Stern, Gregory Gilmartin, and Thomas Mellins, *New York 1930: Architecture and Urbanism between the Two World Wars* (New York: Rizzoli, 1937), 280.

2. Elizabeth Collins Cromley, *Alone Together: A History of New York's Early Apartments* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990), 4.

3. *Ibid.*, 11.

4. Andrew Dolkart, "Living Together: Apartment Living, The Stuyvesant," *The Architecture and Development of New York City*, e-seminar, http://www.nycarchitecture.columbia.edu/0243_2/0243_2_s2_text.html.

5. Robert A. M. Stern, Gregory Gilmartin, and John Massengale, *New York 1900: Metropolitan Architecture and Urbanism, 1890-1915* (New York: Rizzoli, 1983), 280.

6. Andrew Alpern, *New York's Fabulous Luxury Apartments* (New York: Dover, 1975): 48.

7. Kenneth Jackson, "Next Stop Apartment Buildings," *The History of the City of New York with Kenneth Jackson*, e-seminar, http://ci.columbia.edu/0705/web/sect_1/0705_s1.html.

8. Crowley, *Alone Together*, 119.

9. Esther E. Keller, "Modern Kitchen Sinks Appeal to the Woman Prospect," *Buildings and Building Management* 30, no. 2 (December 1, 1930): 67–69. See also, S. R. Firestone, "What Does a Woman Look For in Renting an Apartment?" *Buildings and Building Management* 32, no. 8 (April 18, 1932): 43–44. For further discussion of 1920s marketing campaigns targeted at women, see Andrew S. Dolkart, "Keeping Them in the City: Hudson View Gardens," *The Architecture and Development of New York City*, e-seminar, http://nycarchitecture.columbia.edu/0243_2/0243_2_s5_2_text.html.

10. R. W. Sexton, ed. *American Apartment Houses of Today* (New York: Architectural Book Publishing, 1926), xiv.

11. Anonymous, "Sees Early Gain in Building Work," *New York Times*, October 19, 1930, 159 [sic].

12. Sexton, *American Apartment Houses*, 30.

13. Anonymous. "Tells Some Facts About Vacancies: Space Supply Above Normal but Situation Not Serious Says Douglas Elliman," *New York Times*, January 11, 1933, 3.

Chapter Two: An Altered City?

Apartment alteration didn't start during the Great Depression, the severe economic downturn that followed the stock market crash of October 1929. The idea of upgrading existing housing stock seems to have existed as early as 1919 if not earlier. The journal *Buildings and Building Management*, one of the great proponents throughout the 1930s of the alteration of all classes of buildings, not only residential, ran a graphic in their January 16, 1934, issue which assembled articles from their archive with alteration themes in the titles, demonstrating that they had run at least one such article each year since 1919. The titles for these articles included "Rebuilding an Old 'Taxpayer' for Specialized Tenancy"(1929), "Putting Run Down Apartment Properties Back on a Profitable Basis"(1926), and "Remodeled—A New Power to Attract and Hold Tenants"(1920). (See fig. 7.)

The Depression was also not the only time during the twentieth century in which apartments were cut up. According to personal testimony of a longtime resident of an apartment on the northeast side of the sixth floor at 817 West End Avenue, during the 1960s the landlord offered his parents a rent reduction if they would consent to lose two rooms in the courtyard-facing section of the apartment. They were indeed interested and today those rooms make up a separate apartment.¹ But according to Building Department records, an application in the file requested permission to alter the same building and the same floor in October 1931. "The present two apartments on the northwest corner of 6th floor will be altered into four apartments."² And so, two ends of the same hallway,

northeast and northwest, experienced two waves of alterations, one in the 1930s, the other in the 1960s.

Similarly, at the previously mentioned building, the Riviera, at 790 Riverside Drive, a grand 1910 apartment house entered on the corner of 157th Street, was the subject of a long article in *Buildings and Building Management* in April 1939 about what they called “Resourceful Modernization.”³ Apartments in two wings of the building were rearranged, and some studio and one-bedroom units were made out of formerly ten-room apartments, an alteration carried out by the building’s institutional owner at the time, Metropolitan Life Insurance, using the same architect, D. Everett Waid, who had built Met Life’s 1932 skyscraper on Madison Square. Yet in an interview, Hylton Charlton, a doorman who retired after 34 years of service at 790 Riverside Drive, recalled that when he joined the building staff as a white-gloved elevator operator in 1973, in the back wing of the building, on certain floors, a different cutting up had just been completed. On several floors, during the early 1970s, one of the largest units in the building, the “L” line was cut on some floors in two, into “L’s” and “LX’s” and on other floors into four, into the “R,” “S,” “T,” and “L” units.

Although landlords have always altered apartments, in the 1930s they began to alter far more of them. Instead of continuing to build new apartment buildings as they had in the 1920s, landlords—who might have been banks (if the owners had defaulted because of the Depression) or individual owners or corporations or even a small number of cooperatives—chose to spend money to alter apartment layouts to make more rentable

space in their buildings. The thinking was that even if they got less per room, they still would ultimately earn more money if they had a larger inventory of smaller units available for the renting public, which by and large had less to spend than it had previously.

In addition to the primary focus, the alteration of the layouts, the articles of the period also suggest that the buildings of the earlier part of the century, the pre–World War One buildings, were in need of improvement. They were considered old-fashioned because they had heavy-columned entranceways, iron grilles on doors, and wrought iron balconies—“useless ornament” as it was called in several articles.⁴ The suggestion is that had this been another era, that landlords could have chosen to tear down and rebuild. But that given the tight economy, the difficult times, the best thing that landlords could do was to improve the property that they already owned. And that meant removing the offending ornate entranceways and the excessive trim, to downsize the huge apartments, and along the way, to bring the buildings up to code by fireproofing, fire-escape installation, and sometimes by the installation of other mechanical improvements such as new wiring and new gas pipelines.

During the years 1930 through 1939, by my count, 196 applications were made for apartment alteration of the type under discussion (Class A, Manhattan multiple dwelling, in which the number of rooms were increased along with other changes). Many of the 196 applications were for the cutting up of multiple units on multiple floors in a building, so the actual number of apartments that were altered—and the number of apartments that

these alterations produced when subdivided—is far greater than just the number of applications.

Nowhere did I find any statistics about the percentage of Class A buildings that were altered during this period. Given the title of one article about a building in Brooklyn, “Only Eight Years Old—But Modernizing Pays,” the suggestion is that even some twenties buildings were being remodeled.⁵ There was an application among the 196 I read for the alteration of the Majestic—115 Central Park West at Seventy-second Street—which was built as late as 1930. The cost of the work, overseen by architect Sylvan Bien, was estimated at \$30,000 in the renovation application, which did not contain any details about the alterations to the structure.⁶ A building at 617 West End Avenue at Ninetieth Street, which was constructed in 1925, was also altered in the late 1930s. But for the most part, despite these three examples, the buildings that were altered were substantially older. And had the 1920s market continued, it is always possible that many of them would have been ripped down and replaced with more modern buildings with less ornament, smaller spaces, and more up-to-date appliances.

Class A buildings, which are the focus of this thesis, tended to be clustered in certain neighborhoods, particularly the Upper West Side, Morningside Heights, the Upper East Side, and Washington Heights. In those neighborhoods, the alteration trend had a major impact as ultimately hundreds of apartments in these Class A buildings were altered. The neighborhood that would see the most alteration applications was the Upper West Side.

There were 68 applications for alterations on the west side, south of 110th Street. Trying to make sense of these numbers, it would seem as if the alteration applications were greatest on the Upper West Side because it was a geographically larger neighborhood (2.5 miles stretching from the West Sixties to 110th Street) and had more apartment buildings erected in the 1910s. Many of the altered buildings on the Upper West Side were on West End Avenue, Broadway, and Riverside Drive, perhaps because the grander buildings were located on the avenues, but there were also many alterations on the cross streets, both the two-way, major cross streets such as Seventy-ninth Street and Eighty-sixth Street, and the more minor cross streets, usually with one-way traffic, streets such as Seventy-eighth Street and Eighty-third Street.

Harlem and lower Washington Heights (the neighborhood between 135th Street and 168th Street) had the second greatest number of alterations, although with only half as many applications as the Upper West Side.⁷ (Harlem had 26 applications, lower Washington Heights had 29.) Morningside Heights, a relatively much smaller neighborhood (spanning 110th and 122nd streets, from Riverside Drive to Morningside Park) had 23 applications.

Lower Washington Heights, twice the length of Morningside Heights, running from 135th Street to 168th Street, had few large apartment buildings built after the initial wave of construction that followed the construction of the subway. The kinds of buildings that were prevalent there, particularly on the avenues, were the type that the alteration promoters wrote about: ornate and rambling layouts, and many rooms. Some were not

altered and remained as they were into the twenty-first century. It is rare to find a truly enormous old-world apartment on the Upper West Side today, perhaps because this neighborhood has been extremely desirable since at least the early 1980s and space has been at a premium. On the other hand, Morningside Heights and especially lower Washington Heights are neighborhoods that were considered unsafe until extremely recently, (the open drug-dealing that still occurs on street corners in lower Washington Heights remains a deterrent to gentrification) and are farther from Midtown and therefore less convenient. For these reasons, Morningside Heights and lower Washington Heights were not considered suitable for middle- and upper-middle-class residents to live in until recently, and therefore there are more unaltered, very old-fashioned apartments remaining. Some of these large apartments are sometimes used as rooming houses even today.⁸

Harlem's apartment houses were mostly built in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, but Harlem did not experience the same success in attracting tenants as did other neighborhoods opened up by the subways, such as Morningside Heights and lower Washington Heights. In fact, because there was so much excess building stock in Harlem, landlords began to rent to African Americans, since they were unable to fill the buildings with the white tenants for whom they had built them.

There are perhaps two reasons for the relatively high number of alterations in Harlem. First, there was a great deal of older housing stock. Second, the population that lived there was relatively poorer than that of other neighborhoods. If people had less

money to spend to rent an apartment, landlords were better off, having a relatively large inventory of cheaper, smaller apartments instead of grand apartments or at least large apartments, which no one in the neighborhood could afford.

Washington Heights, above 168th Street, had 16 alteration applications in this era. Inwood had only one. Those numbers may speak to the relative newness of the building stock in those neighborhoods. These two neighborhoods were the farthest from the center of Manhattan and thus would have been built after the new neighborhoods farther downtown.

On what is considered the Upper East Side, south of Ninety-sixth Street and east of Central Park, there were ten applications at addresses such as 838 Park Avenue, 925 Park Avenue, 521 Park Avenue, 798 Lexington Avenue and a few on cross streets. A number of those applications were for the decoupling of duplex apartments into two simplexes, which although a definite diminishment of former luxury, still did not connote the same degree of downsizing as was experienced in some other neighborhoods. (The application for 798 Lexington Avenue was a bit more extreme, creating two apartments per floor on floors three through five, new kitchens and bathrooms.) In east Harlem north of Ninety-sixth Street, there were 13 applications.

Even in 1932, in an article written by a vice president of Pease & Elliman entitled “What Does a Woman Look for in Renting an Apartment?” the author still assumes a level of luxury that was not shared by many at that time: “Many women won’t rent an

apartment unless the butler's pantry has a window in it. . . . Only last month, one of our clients who was considering a large Fifth Avenue apartment, sent her servants to inspect the apartment, and rented it only after the servants had approved of their quarters.”⁹

The smallest number of applications to be found referred to the least residential neighborhoods, which makes sense. There was a small number in the West Forties and Fifties, totaling five, two in what is today Murray Hill, one in Chelsea, one in the West Village, one in the East Village, two on the Lower East Side (which were not tenement rehabs), one at 134 East Seventeenth Street, which by today's designation would be considered Gramercy Park.

Although a great number of articles in industry publications were devoted to the subject of alteration and modernization, the fact that apartments had been downsized and upgraded was not something that was frequently dangled in front of renters. With the exception of one set of display ads for a private corporation set up to do alterations, which will be discussed in a later chapter, no ads heralding the newly rehabbed apartments were to be found in newspapers of the period.¹⁰ It would seem as if this trend were then a response to social, economic, and building conditions, rather than a carefully conceived project considered to be worthy of marketing.

Even if altered apartments were not advertised as such, there must have been enough talk about alteration to make it a topic that developers were concerned about. “‘There is a marked trend toward smaller and smarter apartments,’ said Mr. Sam

Minskoff, a well-known New York developer, whose family, to this day, has a key role in the industry. ‘No matter how skillfully remodeling is undertaken, the results can never equal dwellings which are built to the purpose. The small apartment requires planning of a specialized nature if its facilities are to be complete.’”¹¹

In summary, the apartment alteration phenomenon was not much talked about, except in the journals of the building management trade. But it was a trend that swept across most residential neighborhoods of the city, particularly the areas that had most of Manhattan’s earliest apartment stock, especially the west side of Manhattan between Sixtieth and 160th streets.

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1. Mr. Horan’s partner, Abigail Lumsden is the granddaughter of a resident who moved into apartment 2A in the 1920s, and she confirmed that her grandmother did not allow the apartment to be altered when the offer was made in the 1960s, when the Horan family consented to lose a couple of rooms.
 2. New York City Buildings Department, Docket Books, application number 198. October 19, 1931 (New York City Municipal Archives).
 3. Anonymous, “Resourceful Modernization,” *Buildings and Building Management*, April 1939, 40–43, 62.
 4. Anonymous, “Bank Spends \$100,000 on West Side Houses; Four Altered Buildings Show Larger Income,” *New York Times*, September 29, 1935, Real Estate section. See also: “West End Avenue House Being Remodeled to Provide for 64 Instead of 15 Families,” *New York Times*, March 17, 1935, Real Estate section.
 5. Anonymous, “Only Eight Years Old—But Modernizing Pays,” *Buildings and Building Management* 32, 30–33.
 6. Application for Alteration, December 13, 1938, application 3643.
 7. As late as 1960, a definitions page of a pamphlet put out by the Real Estate Board of New York defined Washington Heights as “125 and Amsterdam Avenue north to Bronx line and all area west to Hudson River, south to 125, east to Amsterdam Avenue.” See “Apartment Building Construction Manhattan, 1202-1953,” Supplement no. 6, March 1960. Also, the notes on the definitions page of the pamphlet cite the Bureau of Records of the Department of Housing and Buildings as a key source.
 8. Jennifer Bleyer, “Limes for Sale, Leases Too,” *New York Times*, December 17, 2006, City section.
 9. S. R. Firestone, “What Does a Woman Look for in Renting an Apartment?” *Buildings and Building Management* 32, no. 8 (April 18, 1932): 43.

10. Display Ad 120, *New York Times*, September 18, 1932, Real Estate section. See also, Display Ad 80, *New York Times*, August 28, 1932, Real Estate section.

11. "New Apartment House at 3 East 66th Street, New York," *Buildings and Building Management* 34 (May 1934): 57.

Chapter 3: Two for One with Closets

What did an alteration look like? Besides new kitchens and baths, and more kitchens and baths as more apartments were created, what was actually done to the apartment layouts that made them appear different and more modern? There were no rules for this practice, but the illustrations of before-and-after layouts in some of the trade publications depict in precise detail some of the changes that were made. Generally, large apartments were cut up in favor of a greater number of smaller apartments. The alterations produced a mix of apartment sizes that began with a studio apartment (in today's parlance)—one room with a bathroom and kitchen, and included also one-bedroom units, two-bedroom units, and much less frequently three-bedroom units. Where two apartments had been laid out in the original plans, there could be as many as four, five, or even six apartments after alterations.

The shapes of the apartments became more regular. While the pre–World War One apartments tended to have kitchens with pantries and servants quarters clustered in wings, those wings would be removed in the alterations. Kitchens were made squarer and were sometimes made larger, but the space did not include pantries and servant areas. Winding halls were straightened out, foyers became larger and squarer, and additional public rooms like libraries were removed. Some large apartments were subdivided into living spaces that lacked dining rooms.

The building at 509 Cathedral Parkway (fig. 8) on 110th Street between Broadway and Amsterdam was altered by the firm of Voorhees, Gmelin & Walker in 1934. One of the most salient features of the changes is the straightening of the winding hallways that were characteristic of many of the earlier pre–World War One buildings. Those hallways often included triangular closets tucked into them. The closets in the new layouts are square or slightly rectangular, and the lines are straight. The formerly multi-angled foyer is now smaller and square as well.

While the original apartments had a servant's bedroom and bathroom in front of a long rectangular kitchen, the new apartment expanded the kitchen into a large square but eliminated the servant's area entirely. Gone also is the library, which had adjoined the living room. In the new layout, the living room is larger, but there also is no dining room. The placement of the foyer angled between the kitchen and the living room suggests that the foyer was meant to be a space for the family to eat its meals.

The orientation of the new apartments was different as well. Where once most of the bedrooms faced the street, and the public rooms faced the rear, in the new layout, more effort is made to place the living rooms at the front and the bedrooms on the sides of the building. The master bedrooms in the largest of the altered apartments are redesigned to include bathrooms en suite. The hallway to the bathroom is long enough to install another closet between the bedroom and bathroom.

At the Riviera, 790 Riverside Drive, at 157th Street, the alterations were more radical (fig. 9). Two extremely long hallways, originally side by side but lying within the confines of parallel apartments, were opened up to become public hallways. The tiling was matched with the existing tile (or else the entire floor was retiled with white tile with a slightly yellowish Greek key pattern along the border) so that the untrained eye would not realize that the new public spaces once existed within apartment walls. The alterations produced two new public hallways in the building, one in the southwestern corner of the building, and one to the north of that area, in the middle of the western side of the building. On the southwestern wing of the building, where once two apartments stood side by side, after 1938, one public hallway became the route to four apartments that stood where there once had been two.

The two side-by-side, ten-room apartments became two one-bedrooms, one with a dressing room add-on, one without, and two two-bedroom apartments, with large kitchens but no servant areas or dining rooms. New rooms were formed out of unlikely spaces, such as the two servants' rooms that were joined together into a closetless bedroom. Presumably the dressing area was created to make up for the lack of a closet in that particular one-bedroom apartment.

Some of the closets that were created in the newly formed apartments were what are today called "walk-in" closets. They were square, wide, and extremely deep. The closets are large enough that today some of them have been rigged to contain washer-dryer units, and in some twenty-first century renovations, they have become part of the

windowless space devoted to a kitchen. In one of the larger southern units, an internal hallway leading to the bedrooms has a series of closets, which exist in addition to the closets within the bedrooms. While the apartments no longer have “wings”—everything follows a straight line—still accommodations are made to replace and improve upon the functionality that was contained in the original spaces.

In the more northerly of the two southwestern wings that were redesigned, only three apartments were created where there were once two. One of those new apartments was a studio in the contemporary sense of the word (one large room with a dressing room and kitchen). Across the hallway was a one-bedroom apartment, made out of the former kitchen and dining area, and at the western end of the hallway one very large apartment was carved out of the remaining space, with three bedrooms, three bathrooms, no servant rooms, an extremely large living room, a small dining room, and rectangular kitchen, without pantry space. In this large “G” apartment, the living room is positioned down a long, wide hallway, at some distance from the kitchen and dining room, with an awkwardness that is reminiscent of the layouts of New York’s earliest apartments. Again, although the “G” apartment is extremely spacious, it does not meander. It has a much more modern feel with squared-off closets and long, straight hallways. Curiously, the only non-square element that has been added to each of the renovated apartments is semi-circular archways between rooms, where once very square lines defined the transitions between rooms.

In 790 Riverside Drive, guests entering the apartments were once ushered down long dark hallways. But in these newly created apartments, including the studio and one-bedrooms, guests could be greeted inside a square foyer inside the doorways. This layout created a more formal division between the public space beyond the door and the apartment that lay within. These foyers were equipped with closet space to allow a host to take a guest's coat and hang it up immediately by the door, an arrangement not afforded by the original layouts.

The final example to be considered here is 617 West End Avenue, a building that was built in 1925 with one apartment per floor, which was remodeled in 1937 (fig. 10). Here the most salient change is the creation of two apartments placed along the front of the building where one long apartment, which was laid out from the front to the back of the building, had existed before. This way, neither apartment could be said to be in the back. Both faced the street.

The two servants' rooms that sat on either side of a bathroom were eliminated along with a substantial pantry area off the kitchen that had once served as a passageway between the kitchen and dining room. Although a dining room is retained, it is placed flush against the kitchen, as if to accommodate the absence of servants to carry plates down a the long passageway. The generous room size is maintained in the two apartments that have been created in place of one, but the rooms are arranged more squarely around shorter hallways, suggesting a box-like layout.

The article that announces these renovations at 617 West End Avenue that ran in *Buildings and Building Management* does not mention the original architect's name or the architectural firm responsible for the renovation. The article states that "plans for the changes were drawn and many items were handled direct [sic] by the engineering department of the bank. Contracts for other changes were handled directly by the institution."¹

In summary, the changes that were made in these apartments moved the environments away from being houses in the sky, creating in their place a very square, more utilitarian environment. These three examples suggest the impression, held by many people in the United States who do not live in apartments, that New Yorkers live in boxes in the sky. It is an image which to this day provokes wonder and even derision. The pre-World War One apartments were more like houses. In their altered forms, had become a new kind of living space.

1. Anonymous, "Two-for-One Subdividing Increases Income," *Buildings and Building Management* 38 (April 1938): 51–52.

Chapter 4: “Salvation is often found in alteration”¹

The title of this chapter, “Salvation is often found in alteration,” taken from the a line in a 1930 article in *Real Estate Record and Builders Guide*, suggesting that the key reason behind the alteration wave was serious financial trouble both for landlords and for people in the building trades. Apartment alteration was a stopgap measure in a very serious economic situation.

The Depression created dire straits for workers and owners alike. In 1930 alone, 1345 banks failed, and corporations’ investment in capital improvement dropped 35% and would drop another 88% in the following year. Unemployment rose to one-quarter of the workforce by 1933. Those who were able to hold on to their jobs experienced wage cuts. America’s GNP dropped 29% between 1929 and 1931.²

Families crowded together into single large apartments. And the knowledge that “doubling up is prevalent,” as one article put it in a caption for an illustration, was not lost on landlords.³ “This [figure] shows a 12-story building with suites of 8, 9 and 10 rooms, difficult to rent and then at very inadequate rentals, most frequently used as illegal rooming houses, altered into small suites, readily rentable . . .” read the caption in *Real Estate Magazine* in September 1932.⁴ “A redivision in the floor plan brings profit represented by subletting back to the owner” was the recommendation of another article on apartment alternations.⁵

This drastic economic decline meant that people weren't paying rent, which hurt landlords. The lack of money for new construction hurt architects as well as various construction tradesmen, from bricklayers to wall painters. It seems without a doubt, then, that the most straightforward reason for the alteration wave was to create a larger number of cheaper apartments, which were easier to fill. The second economically related reason for the alterations was to stimulate the building trades if not by new construction, then by employing people to renovate and alter existing apartments.

At first, the real estate industry was probably unwilling to accept the ubiquity of the vacancy problem. In an article entitled "Is This Depression Really So Bad, After All?" in the April 20, 1931, issue of *Buildings and Building Management*, the author Cornelius Callaghan, president of Cornelius Callaghan, Inc., New York, argues that "while the depression may have increased the difficulties of the collection department, it has had the compensating result of increasing the watchfulness of managers against the professional dead-beats. With collections coming hard, the management must be more and more alert to avoid committing itself in a lease to undesirables and known dead-beats."⁶ But had Callahan been asked only a year or two later, he might have admitted that it wasn't just dead-beats in this era who couldn't pay the rent.

Although the first official city survey of vacancy was not conducted until 1934, indicators prior to that time suggest that there were problems with vacancy rates. One such indicator was a 1932 "Talk of the Town" piece in the *New Yorker* which marvels that the Stuyvesant, the "first apartment building" in New York, which was built in 1873,

was “a hundred per cent rented right now, which alone would be reason for mentioning it.”^{7, 8, 9}

In March 1934, the Real Property Survey of Manhattan conducted by the New York City Housing Authority in cooperation with the Civil Works Administration and the Bureau of Foreign and Domestic Commerce found that of the 582,804 residential units in Manhattan, 101,200 or 17.4% were vacant.¹⁰ Rents were said to be down 22% from 1929 to 1934. The most vacancies were found in Greenwich Village (21.2%) while the fewest were in Washington Heights, “Manhattan’s comparatively new residential sections, from 134th Street north to the tip of the island.”¹¹ The fewest vacancies were also to be found in one-room apartments.¹² The same survey noted that “four out of every five residential buildings in the borough were erected prior to 1899,” but that statistic would also include row houses, which might account for the high number of older buildings.

At the same time that vacancies were up, new construction was down. A chart published in the *Real Estate Record* shows, among other details, the amount of money spent on new construction of residential buildings in “37 eastern states,” a cross section that seems to recur in their information graphics of the period. The precipitous decline in new construction of residential buildings is salient.¹³

In the first entry from 1928, \$2,788,000,000 was spent on residential construction. (It is written as \$2,788 but the superscript indicates that this number is given “in millions of dollars.”) That number declined year by year, though it fell most precipitously between

1931 and 1932. In 1931, \$811 or \$811,000,000 was spent on new residential construction, and the following year only \$280,000,000 was spent, or about another two-thirds less. New construction continued to decline in 1933 and 1934. It dropped by another \$30,000,000 to \$249,000,000.

It should be noted that these new construction figures do not segregate residential buildings but still illustrate an overall trend. However, a graph published by the F. W. Dodge Company, the owner of the *Real Estate Record*, does indicate residential construction on a separate line on the graph (fig. 11). It plots contracts awarded between 1929 and 1938, with residential construction distinguished from a line for “all other.”¹⁴ According to this chart, the worst years for residential contracts were from the middle of 1932 to the beginning of 1935, where the number appears to be about one-quarter of the way between the \$0 and \$100 million. The nadir of “all other” construction contracts coincides with part of the residential trough, and looks to be about the end of the first quarter of 1933.¹⁵

The other key part of these trends is that by 1934, alterations had begun to surpass new construction, a fact that is even noted in a *New York Times* headline from 1934. The headline reads “Alterations Lead Building Activity: Modernization Campaigns and Desire to Attract Tenants Spur Improvements . . . More Apartments Here Report Full Occupancy after Remodeling Work.”¹⁶ In 1933, \$1,431,330 was spent on alterations while less than three-quarters of that amount, \$350,000, was spent on new buildings. The

numbers in 1934 continued that ratio: \$891,325 spent on alteration, \$225,750 spent on new construction.

Nineteen thirty-five is the first year during the Depression when new construction once again led alterations, a pattern that held before and after the Depression. The figure of \$2,669,640 spent on new construction is almost twice the number for alteration, \$1,479,900. In 1937, the ratio is about 4:1 in favor of new construction. It is worth noting that these relationships are specific to Manhattan. In the Bronx and Queens, even throughout the earlier years of the Depression, new construction dollars spent always led alteration. (It might be argued that there was less existing housing stock to alter in those more newly constructed areas and that the apartment buildings that were there were already built with a large number of smaller units.)

But just when things were starting to look up, the city experienced another economic downturn. Between August and October 1937, the Dow Jones Industrial Average declined 40%, and between September and the end of 1937, 2 million workers lost their jobs.¹⁷ In early 1938, sales of automobiles fell 50% while unemployment was up to 12.5 million.¹⁸ It is said that two-thirds of the recovery experienced since 1933 had been lost.¹⁹

As might be expected, the figures for alteration versus new construction reflect this downturn—however, not immediately. In 1938, more money was still spent on new construction, perhaps because projects that had been started earlier were still being

carried out. New construction accounted for \$3,362,100 while only \$1,464,191 was spent on alteration. But in 1939, the impact of that recession is demonstrated in a significant inversion. While \$1,171,155 is spent on alterations in Manhattan, only \$953,600 is spent on new construction.

My more specific reading of the alteration applications offers a slightly different perspective on the numbers. In terms of number of applications made for the multi-story Class A dwellings in Manhattan, the two biggest years were 1932 and 1936. In each of those years, 37 applications were made: 31 were filed in 1937, 18 in 1938, and 14 in 1939. It is hard to gauge the amount spent because the applications always gave an estimated figure; however, one of the largest numbers filed was in 1937, for work that was actually completed in 1938. Metropolitan Life Insurance's application for the alteration of 790 Riverside Drive estimated the job would cost \$175,000, while many other alterations listed estimates of \$5,000 to \$10,000. Some were for even less, while others ranged from \$25,000 to \$50,000. (In general, those jobs listed as being done for buildings owned by lending institutions tended to have far higher prices associated with them than those applications filed by individual owners. It makes sense that these banks could and did hire the bigger architectural firms, and also that the bank official overseeing the alteration was likely to have had less knowledge of the project and therefore less budgetary concern or control than a small-time building owner with less to spend on the alteration job.)

If the alterations were a sign of hard times, the alteration boosters in the trade publications wanted landlords to see the bright side. The dire economic circumstances of the country offered a great opportunity for landlords to upgrade their property, wrote the trades. After all, this was a time when, as one article marveled, “labor has been plentiful and cheap,”²⁰ and as another said, according to the federal government, bathtubs were selling at 40% of the price they were selling at in 1925.²¹

Article titles also reveal more of that sentiment. In the April 20, 1931, issue of *Buildings and Building Management* (the twenty-fifth anniversary issue of the magazine) there is an article entitled “Renting Would be a Tough Job with 1906 Plumbing.” The October 1934 issue of *Buildings and Building Management* ran a story entitled “Apartments with Mechanical Refrigeration Have Fewer Vacancies.”²² The “exigencies of the last few years,” said another article on building modernization with reference to the Depression, created a fertile moment in what was being presented as a necessary move toward rehabilitation of older structures.²³

An alteration booster named J. C. Knapp, vice president of the Otis Elevator Company, gave a speech which was quoted in *Buildings and Building Management*. “Rental space cannot be shipped elsewhere, nor can it be readily be thrown on the junk heap to make way for space of a better or newer variety,” he said. “To demolish the old structure and to replace it with a larger one under present conditions would probably be suicidal. Modernization is the course plainly indicated.”²⁴

Rather than admitting that alteration was all about making do under difficult circumstances, Knapp at least in public chose to see the trend as the beginning of a change in American attitudes. “Is it not also possible that, from now on, we may expect a decided shift in American building practice? If so, the result will be that we will more nearly approach the conditions existing in Europe. By this I mean that the number of new buildings will, from now on, be relatively small; however, on the other hand, a recognized policy of continuous modernization will not only replace the old method, but become the relatively more important.”²⁵ If the construction boom of the early twenty-first century is any indication, Mr. Knapp was wrong. Americans have not become more like Europeans. Tearing down buildings and replacing them with newer and more modern structures continues to be a trend in New York City more than 75 years after the alteration boom of the 1930s.

However, enough alteration was done during this time of little new construction that the layout and size of a significant number of New York City apartments changed. Many Manhattan residents probably have no idea that their apartments might have been originally designed differently than the space that they currently inhabit. And it served a social purpose as well. For the difficult years of the Depression, alteration kept people in work and it kept landlords from defaulting.

1. Charles G. Quinlan, “The Economics of Alteration,” *Real Estate Record and Builders Guide* 126, no. 18 (November 1, 1930): 5.

2. David F. Burg, *The Great Depression* (New York: Facts On File, 2005), 61.

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3. Peter A. Stone, "A Relation of Population to Apartments," *Real Estate Record and Guide* 130 (October 15, 1932): 5.
 4. Edward J. Moeller, "Practical Steps for Conserving Value of Sound Buildings," *Real Estate Magazine* 20 (September 1932): 6.
 5. Charles J. Quinlan, "The Economics of Alterations," *Real Estate Record and Builders Guide* 126, no. 18 (November 1, 1930): 5.
 6. Cornelius Callaghan, "Is This Depression Really So Bad, After All?" *Buildings and Building Management* 31, no. 8 (April 20, 1931): 61–62.
 7. Anonymous, "Manhattan Residential Vacancies As Shown By Inventory," *Real Estate Record* (July 21, 1934): 6–7.
 8. "Stuyvesant's Folly," Talk of the Town, *New Yorker*, September 10, 1932, 12.
 9. It is worth noting that despite the chatter in the professional magazines that the solution to vacancies was modernization, the Stuyvesant was a distinctly unmodern building that was renting very well. The *New Yorker* further noted that the Stuyvesant was still a walk-up, that "the rooms are enormous, many of them have two fireplaces. The apartments mostly run to seven rooms, with some five-room studios on the top floor . . . The place held out against modernity until rather recently, when electric lights were put in, if the tenants requested them."
 10. Maybe as a result of the Depression, this publication would later revert to being a monthly, with the addition of one supplementary issue published each year on January 16.
 11. Anonymous, "Survey of New York Apartments Proves Enlightening," *Buildings and Building Management* 34 (August 1934): 33–34.
 12. Anonymous, "Manhattan Housing Survey Gives Vacancy Data," *Buildings and Building Management* 34, no. 10 (September 1934), 61.
 13. C. B. Loudon, "Office and Apartment House Construction Trends," *Real Estate Record* 139, no. 8 (February 20, 1937): 27.
 14. *Ibid.*, 27.
 15. *Ibid.*, 27
 16. L. E. Cooper, "Alterations Lead Building Activity: Modernization Campaigns and Desire to Attract Tenants Spur Improvements; Examples in Exhibition," *New York Times*, Oct. 28, 1934, Real Estate section.
 17. David F. Burg, *The Great Depression* (New York: Facts on File, 2005): 191.
 18. *Ibid.*, 219.
 19. *Ibid.*, 192.
 20. Anonymous. "Building Managers Discuss Pressing Problems," *Real Estate Magazine* 20, no. 4 (January 1932): 102.
 21. Norman J. Radder, "Additional Bathrooms Increase Apartment Rentability," *Buildings and Building Management* 34, no. 1 (January 16, 1934): 87.
 22. Anonymous, "Apartments with Mechanical Refrigeration Have Fewer Vacancies," *Buildings and Building Management* (October 1934): 69.
 23. Anonymous, "Trends in Modernization Revealed in 1935 Survey," *Buildings and Building Management* 34, no.12 (November 1934): 21.
 24. Anonymous, "New Space in Old Buildings," Editorial, *Real Estate Magazine* (August 1932): 21.

25. Ibid., 21.

Chapter 5: Farewell to Maids' Rooms

In the December 1931 issue of *American Architect*, Charles H. Lench, a writer whom the article credits as lecturing at Columbia University on “the Architect’s Relation to the Promotion and Financing of Income Producing Building,” examined the economics of new construction of a site on Riverside Drive. Although the article outlines a financial model for new construction, it also reflects the thinking that guided the apartment alterations during the Depression.

Lench’s article describes a consulting job he took on in early 1931, a successful attempt to find a workable plan to rebuild a site at Ninety-fifth Street and Riverside Drive, which at that time contained a six-story, non-fireproof building, one that according to Lench had been losing money for many years. Lench believed that the vacancies were not due to the fact that it was a poorly planned, dark, and mechanically outmoded structure but because at the time “a demand for such large suites actually did not exist.”¹

In the article, Lench attempts to maximize the return on the site, laying out the economic implications of various scenarios, altering factors, including the overall volume of the building, the size of the rooms, and the size of the actual apartments or suites. He points out that he had working for him the 1929 Multiple Dwelling Law, which allowed for taller apartment houses (as opposed to allowing height only to apartment hotels, which had been the case prior to the new law).

Lench believed that no one wanted large suites, and that “gross income could be increased . . . if additional rental units could be obtained within the envelope of the building and if a larger rental than \$500 per unit could be counted upon.”² He began by working out the costs on 11 apartments per floor, the largest of which would be no bigger than a two-bedroom with a dining room. This he felt could bring in a 9.3% return on a cash investment of \$500,000.³

Lench reports that despite his belief in the lack of a market for large apartments, his clients began their process by consulting an Upper West Side “renting specialist,” and that this specialist’s opinion was just the opposite. This specialist believed that in order to sell the new units, the rooms needed to be large, and there needed to be relatively few apartments. Lench’s first stab at his assignment is summarized in a call-out box that reads: “Larger Suites: . . . 2,100,300 cu. ft; 543 rooms; rental \$500 per room; 5.7% return on equity.” (See fig. 13).

Not satisfied with his numbers, the renting specialists suggested even larger rooms to increase the appeal of the apartments. Going back to his model, Lench slightly increased the volume of the building, and planned for only 505 rooms, renting at \$550 per room, with only seven apartments on a floor (30 rooms, 505 in the building as a whole). Rough calculations taking into account 50% vacancy worked out to be a 6.2% return on equity (fig. 14).

Still unhappy with the numbers and convinced that he knew better than the renting specialists, Lench followed his own instincts about room size and number and shifted the whole program. He increased the number of apartments on the floor from 7 to 13 (42 rooms, 697 in the entire building). “By his calculations, the yield in this model was 15%. It will be noted that the largest suite in this plan . . . comprises living room, two chambers, dinette and kitchen. Most of the apartments of this plan are arranged with living room, chamber and kitchen; the smallest units consist of living room and kitchen only.”⁴ (See fig. 15.)

As the working drawings were being developed, “it was realized that a business depression of major proportions was imminent.”⁵ The final arrangement that was executed pushed the formula to 15 apartments per floor (46 room, 780 in the building as a whole) with the average rental at \$450 per room; also 15% return on equity. These cheaper apartments proved very attractive to renters, and by October 1 (the height of the renting season at that time) 90% of the apartments were rented (fig. 16).⁶

One of the downsides of having so many units, Lench points out, is the need for so many kitchens and baths, which included relatively expensive equipment. He was able to balance those expenses, however, by “simplifying the exterior design. For example, instead of the usual three stories of limestone facing, the brickwork was carried down to the granite base course and one or two bands of terra-cotta used instead.”⁷ Lench may have designed his Riverside Drive building without exterior ornament as a means of

equalizing the expense of additional toilets and sink. But it also fit with the fashion of what was considered modern at the time.

Lench was designing new apartments on Ninety-fifth Street and Riverside Drive early in the Depression, although he was not an alterer of existing apartments. But what he came up with was a similar to the thinking of those who altered apartments. The solution to the soft rental market was to have more apartments in total, even if each of those apartments contained fewer rooms. Even though these smaller apartments would bring in less rent, there were more of them, and they were more likely to be rented, and there would be less of a likelihood that apartments would be left vacant. Landlords would stand to make more money if they had more, smaller and cheaper units rented out than if their buildings contained larger more expensive units but only some of those units were occupied.

Included in the apartment alterations of the thirties were overall upgrades of apartment features. The must-haves of modernization were described in great detail in various real estate trade magazine articles. Besides “small suites,” they included color in bathrooms, a built-in soap niche, two towel racks, lettered name plates on mailboxes, ventilation devices in doors, a swinging faucet in the kitchen sink, a combination radio and power outlet for “radio convenience,” and Electrolux refrigerators.^{8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13}

Built-in clothes hampers were also on the list, as were Venetian blinds. And streamlined design in bathroom equipment—“Not that they are streamlined in the airplane sense, but they run to simple clean lines.”¹⁴

These modern features were marketed to building managers and owners in the trade publications. The message was that if you, the manager or owner, included these features in your apartments, you would be more likely to attract tenants and not have vacancies. An ad for Electrolux from January 1933 includes a letter to Brooklyn Union Gas Company stating that with the installation of Electrolux refrigerators, 269 Prospect Place, Brooklyn became fully rented (fig. 12).¹⁵ Other advertisements speak to the ability of landlords to take down their vacancy signs if they include these new gas stoves in their units. (See fig. 17, fig. 19.)

An article that decried the unfair whims of tenants during the Depression in Washington Heights and west Bronx noted another new popular feature that tenants expected. “Gayly colored gas stoves having the appearance of a low buffet with fancy straight bakelite hinged handles replace the stoves of a vintage of three years ago.”¹⁶ But another publication was all for electric kitchens.(fig. 18) Apartments had to be outfitted with electric ranges, clocks, and exhaust fans. Kitchen floors had to be linoleum. Cabinets had to be stainless steel. Kitchen hardware had to be chromium-plated.¹⁷

Many of these details were meant to appeal to women. As at least two articles noted, if a woman were to consider her husband’s desires (after satisfying her own), the number one item on his wish list would be ease of transportation to his office and number two whether or not the apartment had a shower.¹⁸ “Shower stalls have a distinct appeal to

many men. And even though the wife may select the apartment, it helps a lot to have the husband seriously interested in it, too.”¹⁹

An article from May 1936 refers to features that were “seen in the latest of the pre-Depression construction and which has since been incorporated in numerous modernizations in New York.”²⁰ The new construction, which was beginning to occur in 1936, also incorporated these pre-Depression features, therefore increasing the demand that they be incorporated into modernizations. Among those elements of layout are the “circular gallery next to the entry, from which doors lead to most of the rooms of the suite,” and a “dining foyer” or “dining balconies” or “dining galleries” “separated from the living room only by an ornamental wrought iron railing.”²¹

Air conditioning and central heating and cooling system began to be included in new construction, and began to be incorporated into modernizations as well. An article about a new building under construction in 1936, to replace a 1910 structure on Eightieth Street and West End Avenue (because the layouts of the prior building were found too difficult to adapt to modern requirements) discussed the need to install water piping and electric outlets in each of the living rooms “for possible air conditioning units that may be installed later by the tenants.” Under the tentative plans of the management, “electric current used for air conditioning would be paid for by the tenant, who will also pay for the installation. The water will be paid for by the building owner.”²²

A trade article commented that not only has air conditioning for apartments “arrived” “but also that the invention is adaptable to existing structures built long before air-conditioning was in prospect.”²³ An article about the refitting of 400 Park Avenue, originally built in 1915, discussed the installation of a central air system. “The system selected is a combination of central plant and single units, designed for year-round operation.”²⁴

Even for buildings that did not install air conditioning during this period, trades suggested that the owner consider “heating plant modernization, replacement of old plumbing and heating pipe systems and provision for modern types of radiator and plumbing fixtures.”²⁵ In 790 Riverside Drive, where only two wings of the building were altered, gas lines were re-run at the time of the alteration so that each apartment in those wings had its own line. However, the northern section of the building, (where existing tenants were moved during the renovations of the southwestern wings), remained untouched, with a single gas line serving four originally laid-out apartments.²⁶

One feature that became popular in new construction that the author notes “would not have been possible in a modernization job” was the corner window. “Old-time corner column supports do not allow this additional rental adjunct.”²⁷ Three buildings that were built on the West Eighties in this era, one on Eightieth Street and West End Avenue, one at 5 West Eighty-sixth Street off Central Park West, and another at 565 West End Avenue on Eighty-seventh Street all made use of these windowed corners. This seems to be the only feature that the modernization boosters admit as being impossible to recreate in

modernization. Even dropped living rooms are possible if the building is being gutted, but not corner wrap-around windows.

The architects who engaged in alteration during the Depression were the same set who were involved in speculative apartment construction just before the Depression and at the tail end of the Depression, during the mid- to late 1930s. They needed work, just as everyone else did at the time, and in the early thirties, the work to be had was in modernization. Some architects who did alterations before World War One had been speculative apartment house designers and had built the types of buildings that came to be altered during the Depression. The architectural firms involved in alteration included Schwartz & Gross (prolific architects responsible for many West End Avenue buildings among others around the city), George F. Pelham (who designed many west side and Morningside Heights buildings), and Emery Roth (who designed the Beresford at Eighty-first Street and Central Park West among many others).

Other firms were known for their non-residential work. Voorhees, Gmelin & Walker, which did the alteration on 509 Cathedral Parkway, were actually better known for office skyscraper including the Irving Trust Building and the Western Union Building. Sylvan Bien, who had completed the Carlyle Hotel in 1930, and would do numerous alterations. Vertner Tandy, the first African American architect to be registered in New York State, who had designed a number of churches among other buildings, also did one alteration project during this period in Harlem.

There were many names among the alteration application lists that would become better known later, such as Leon & Lionel Levy (the architects of the Coliseum Building, formerly on Columbus Circle) and Philip Birnbaum (for the many modern and less distinguished buildings from the 1950s through the 1980s). Other names that came up with even more frequency included Sydney Daub, Samuel Roth, Robert Swartburg, William Shirley, A. J. Simberg—architects who were less well known but were kept employed by alterations.

The work of these architects included “modernizations” and subdivisions. The alteration applications all indicate the new number of rooms that could be made out of the spaces. They read like this: “Apartments will be increased from two to four on each floor from the second to the fifth.”²⁸ “Re-arrangement of apartments from 4-7 room apartments and one 4-room apartment to eight 3 room apartments and one 4 room apartment, including fire retarding of stair halls, etc.”²⁹ “Dividing apartment ‘AA’ on 7th floor into 2 apartments. Dividing apartments A & C into 4 apartments total on 7th floor. Dividing apartment C on the 4th floor into 2 apartments. Providing new fire escape at yard to run from 4th floor to roof, etc.”³⁰ Or they cited the new and increased number of families that could live in a building (“23 families . . . changed to 26 families.”³¹ 36 families . . . changed to 42 families”).³² The references are telegraphic, but when read one after the other they begin to suggest a kind of written code of the period, suggested by the frequency with which these kinds of phrases were written.

It was remarkable what could be done with some of the huge spaces that existed in the pre-World War One buildings. In the modernization of 400 Park Avenue, by Walker & Gillette, a former 17 x 40 living room was to be altered to contain part of the “new living room, a complete dining room, full-sized kitchen and maid’s room with separate bath.”^{33, 34}

During the 1930s one of the non-financial arguments for the need for modernization was not only the fact of numerous vacancies caused by the Depression but also the changing sociological picture of the Manhattan families. The financial issue might have been the driving force, but the sociological arguments are interesting and should be mentioned. In 1934, an article stated that “Manhattan’s typical family is a mother, father, and child living in four rooms for which they pay \$33.21 a month, in an apartment house erected before the child’s parents were born . . . The family rent is \$10.42 less than it was in 1930 and although the building in which the trio resides is more than thirty-five years old, it is in first-class condition, or will be when minor repairs are made.”³⁵

L. Seth Schnitman, the chief statistician for the F. W. Dodge Corporation, wrote a 1931 article in which he declares that there are many “striking changes in the housing demands of Manhattan residents indicated for the future [t]he most significant of these revolves around the diminishing importance of children as a factor in determining what these housing standards and forms shall be.”³⁶ In a later article examining national housing changes affecting construction, Schnitman refers to an additional factor besides

the declining birth rate which he calls the “curve of celibacy.”³⁷ Schnitman noted that “the number of Manhattan residents under five years of age declined 46% from 1920 to 1930.” Manhattan also experienced an overall population loss of 17% between 1920 and 1930 (fig. 23).

An article written in 1937 was headlined “Growing Demand Seen for Small Dwellings: Studies of population trends are held to indicate that more than half of all new residential construction should be destined to provide homes for families of two or three persons.” The article noted that older persons constituted 5.4 percent of the population and were increasingly living apart from their children. “Studies in New York of elderly couples on pensions show that most of them are living in quarters far too large for their needs because of their inability to find smaller quarters for comparable rents.”³⁸

Other factors that were said to affect demand for small apartments included “housekeeping efficiency and canned foods” and the phenomenon referred to in the era as “the servant question” or “the servant problem,” which “. . . caused gradual retrenchments in the size of apartments, a decrease of kitchen and dining room requirements, and the elimination of extra rooms, including maids’ rooms.”^{39, 40} The author further noted that “Although this retrenchment has been accentuated by the present financial stringency, it is nevertheless a permanent condition in the life of New York.”⁴¹

One of the forces aggravating the “servant question”—was the low rate of immigration into the United States during the Depression. The Immigration Act of 1924,

which went into effect in 1929, set numerical limits on immigration based on “national origin.” This factor combined with the worldwide depression caused immigration levels to drop precipitously during the 1930s to a low of 23,068 immigrants in 1933, which was the lowest since 1831 “and has been surpassed in every year since.”⁴² A real estate trade magazine article mused whether “opportunities in America will not appear so golden in the future, either, not because of this business depression, but because of a lack of the continued rapid expansion here might change the average European’s view of the ‘land of promise.’”⁴³

The opening line of “Modernization: 3 Case Studies in Tenement Remodeling” by the architect of Union Dime Savings Bank, John S. Burrell, summed up the opinion of the time, at least the opinion of the industry at the time: “...the trend toward smaller families, particularly in metropolitan centers, has changed family housing requirements from units consisting of several rooms to units consisting of a few well-arranged rooms.”⁴⁴

With economics as the driver, these apartment alterations were successful. They produced a greater number of cheaper apartments, where large but frequently vacant apartments had stood before. These smaller apartments cost less and were therefore more likely to be rented, and even though they cost less per unit there were more of them, so the net income number was greater. The owners could rely on some of the very established names who built Manhattan’s speculative apartment buildings to carry out the alterations in a first-class manner. And while moving around partitions, landlords could acknowledge changing fashions in their choices of fixtures, from gaily colored gas stoves

to all-electric kitchens, from dropped living rooms with wrought iron rails, to central-air-controlled spaces. (See figs. 20, 21, 22). Sociologists could convince writers eager to comment on something other than the severity of the Depression that the Manhattan family size was shrinking, the elderly were no longer living with their children, and no one could either afford or find servant material anymore, so why have a maid's room if you no longer had a maid?

1. Charles H. Lench, "15% Profit, 90% Rented When Done, Analyses and Financial Set-up Plans," *American Architect* 80, no. 2602 (December 1931): 40.

2. Ibid., 43.

3. Ibid., 43.

4. Ibid., 43.

5. Ibid., 74.

6. Ibid., 74.

7. Ibid., 74.

8. Anonymous, "Only Eight Years Old—But Modernizing Pays," *Buildings and Building Modernization* 32, no. 4 (Feb. 22, 1932): 32.

9. Anonymous, "Successful Modernization of Kitchens and Bathrooms," *Buildings and Building Management* 36, no. 2 (January 16, 1936): 99.

10. Anonymous, "Profitable Opportunities in Modernizing Apartments," *Buildings and Building Management* 33, no. 2 (January 1933): 125.

11. Ibid., 125.

12. Anonymous, "Successful Modernization of Kitchens and Bathrooms," *Buildings and Building Management* 36, no. 2 (January 16, 1936): 98.

13. Ibid., 126.

14. Anonymous, "The Distinguishing Features of Modern Bathrooms," *Buildings and Building Management* 37, no. 1 (January 16, 1937): 66.

15. Ibid., 129.

16. David W. Kempner, "Tenants' Whims Termed Check on Realty Gains," *New York Herald Tribune*, January 31, 1932, 8.

17. Ibid., 55.

18. S. R. Firestone, "What Does a Woman Look for in Renting an Apartment," *Buildings and Building Management*, 32, no. 8 (April 18, 1932): 43.

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19. Anonymous, "Profitable Opportunities in Modernizing Apartments," *Buildings and Building Management* 33, no. 2 (January 16, 1933): 130.
 20. New York's Newest Apartments, "A 1935 Answer to Speculation about the Apartments of the Future," *Buildings and Building Management* 35 (May 1936): 55.
 21. New York's Newest Apartments, "A 1935 Answer to Speculation about the Apartments of the Future," *Buildings and Building Management* 35 (May 1936): 55.
 22. New York's Newest Apartments, "A 1936 Answer to Speculation about the Apartments of the Future," *Buildings and Building Management* 35 (May 1936): 52.
 23. Anonymous, "Modernized Apartments To Be Fully Air Conditioned," *Buildings and Building Management* 35 (May 1936): 56.
 24. Ibid., 57.
 25. Anonymous, "Modernization Work Increases as Market Improves," *Buildings and Building Management* 36, (March 1936): 75.
 26. Personal experience following January 9, 2005, gas line shut down, as Coop Board President. Also, see reference to upgrading of mechanicals in 790 Riverside Drive in "Resourceful Modernization," *Buildings and Building Management* 39 (April 1939): 40.
 27. Ibid., 54-55.
 28. Application for 415 Amsterdam Avenue, November 24, 1937, Building Alteration Docket Books (New York City Municipal Archives).
 29. Application for 347-49 W. 116th Street, Aug. 29, 1933, Building Alteration Docket Books (New York City Municipal Archives).
 30. Application for 301 W. 108th Street and 300 W. 109th Street, June 22, 1933, Building Alteration Docket Books (New York City Municipal Archives). This job was carried out by Schwartz & Gross for Mutual Life Insurance Company of New York.
 31. Application for 190 Riverside Drive, Sept. 8, 1932, Building Alteration Docket Books (New York City Municipal Archives).
 32. Application for 14 Morningside Ave., February 18, 1932, Building Alteration Docket Books (New York City Municipal Archives).
 33. Louis C. Stone, "400 Park Avenue, A Venture in Change," *American Architect and Architecture* 36, no. 2652 (December 1936): 59.
 34. Ibid., 60.
 35. Anonymous, "The Typical Family Residing in Manhattan," *Real Estate Record* 34, no. 14 (October 6, 1934): 6.
 36. L. Seth Schnitman, "Striking Changes in Manhattan Housing Demands Imminent," *Real Estate Record and Builders Guide* 128, no. 6, 3308, August 8, 1931): 1.
 37. L. Seth Schnitman, "Sociological Changes Affecting New Residential Construction," *Real Estate Record and Builders Guide* 128 (September 12, 1931): 10.
 38. Cahtarien F. Kansing, "Growing Demand Seen for Small Dwellings," *Real Estate Record* 140, no. 8 (August 21, 1937): 40.
 39. Ibid., 40.

40. Edgar H. Moeller, "Practical Steps for Conserving Value of Sound Buildings: Study of Structures Physically Fit But No Longer Up to Present Day Residential Requirements, Reveals that in Hundreds of Instances Owner's Equity Could Be Saved and Mortgagee's Investment Protected by Extension of Further Credit for Modernization," *Real Estate Magazine* 20 (September 1932): 7.

41. *Ibid.*, 40.

42. "Immigration Policy Report: A Short History of U.S. Immigration Policy," The Immigration Law Foundation, 1999, http://www.aifl.org/ipc/policy_reports_1996_pr9613.html

43. Anonymous, "Significant Changes in Trends of Population," *Buildings and Building Management*, 32 (October 1932): 38.

44. John S. Burrell, "Modernization: 3 Case Studies in Tenement Remodeling," *Real Estate Record and Buildings Guide* 134, no. 15 (October 13, 1934): 7.

Chapter 6: Money for Modernization

One of the biggest issues confronting landlords with high vacancy rates during the bleak economic conditions in the 1930s was where to find the funds for alteration. “In these days of penury, real estate investors are apt to draw the purse strings at the wrong time. Fearing to throw good money after bad the owner or more likely the mortgagee, will hesitate to put up the money that would mean the salvation of the original investment.”¹ As one contemporary author put it: “The modernization work... is simply spending money in new sales features instead of losing it in rent.”² Where was that money going to come from?

As the Depression continued, the architecture profession began to beat the drums for modernization as a means to keep people in the industry employed. A July 1932 article by Benjamin F. Betts, AIA, declared that “for the new few years the reconditioning of existing buildings will be the building industry’s major activity.” The AIA called for the need for exhibitions to promote the alteration option. An inset box in the article calls for readers to offer help: “If you have altered or modernized buildings please send the following information: Year built and Year altered. 2. Cost of Alterations 3. Increased value or revenue derived by the owner as a result of the reconditioning. This information will be placed at the disposal of groups desiring to assemble photographs, drawings, and data for exhibition purposes.”³

Several public exhibitions were held in order to further the cause and to draw attention to the needs of the industries involved. In January 1934, a Building Modernization Exhibit was held at Rockefeller Center, organized by the Real Estate Board.⁴ In March of 1936, another exhibition was held at the Port Authority Commerce Building at 111 Eighth Avenue. Although at this point, the focus also included new construction, an article noted that “the value of building modernization also will be emphasized.”⁵ In this 1936 exhibition, “a model of a modern apartment prepared by the creative home planning division of the WPA Federal Art Project” was on display.⁶

The need for funds to underwrite modernization was one of the key issues at hand. An article from October 1934 reports on a new nonprofit organization of more than 150 business and professional leaders in the real estate, planning, and architectural fields that was formed in New York “in order to put more power into the modernization movement.”⁷ The organization’s president, Louis K. Comstock, pointed out the current problems with alterations:

Numbers of property owners are anxious to do the necessary work to modernize and rehabilitate but lack the funds. Banks, insurance companies and other financing organizations have piled up large balances and they are looking for safe places either to invest or lend their money. Wide-spread financing has been help up, however, because the banks have not as yet been convinced as to the soundness of the projects which they have been invited to finance.⁸

The new organization “is designed to act as a clearing house to receive, consider and appraise rehabilitation and modernization projects, submitted by property owners in the metropolitan area and to refer those which it finds to be economically sound to banks and other lending agencies with the stamp of its approval.”⁹

No follow-up story or later reference was found that evaluated the success or even the volume handled by this association. Another private sector solution seemed to be equally short-lived or at least under-reported after it moved beyond the announcement phase. In November 1932, *Building and Building Management* magazine reported on the founding of an entity known as the Rehabilitation Corporation, founded “with the hope of solving this problem for the owner who was unable to improve his buildings, also to stimulate the business of architects and builders who would obtain employment if these owners were able to improve their properties.”¹⁰ The partners in the corporation were companies that manufactured materials required in renovation: Anaconda Copper Mining and its subsidiary the American Brass Company, the Bigelow-Sanford Carpet Company, Kerner Incinerator Company, Otis Elevator Company and Westinghouse Electric and Manufacturing Company among others.

The Rehabilitation Corporation offered a financing scheme for landlords to lighten the financial load of alteration. They created installment plans for one to three years. The company was willing to do the work for a down payment of between 10% and 20%. Financing fees varied according to the length of time borrowed. For the first year there was no fee, but three years would cost 5½%.

In February 1933, *Buildings and Building Management* ran a feature about 1361 Madison Avenue, a building, for which the *New York Times* had been running display ads throughout the fall of 1932, all of them mentioning the role of the Rehabilitation

Corporation in the renovation. In this case the owners found their own bank to finance the work and the Rehabilitation Corporation was maintained to carry out the work of architects, engineers, and general contractors. It was practically what in today's parlance would be called a "gut rehab"—the title of the article was "Modernize or Tear It Down!"¹¹

The Rehabilitation Corporation, however, is only traceable to the work that was done on that one building, through those display ads and a 1932 feature in the *New York Times*. The *New York Times* article made it sound like a grand solution to New York's problems of the time and made it sound as if the Corporation were so occupied with work in New York that it was unable to meet its initial desire to work nationwide. But from the lack of mention thereafter, it seems as if the Rehabilitation Corporation disappeared without having realized its role in the alteration wave.¹²

A January 1933 article entitled "The Money for Modernization" examined the class of institutional owners who found themselves in possession of an obsolete building because of a borrower's default. The article suggests that the institution should "sell the property to an investor with the condition that the buyer would carry out the improvements. The institution makes the sale and takes back a first mortgage, the terms of the deal specifying the modernization work to be done." The author gives an example of an item in a New York newspaper describing three buildings on West Fifty-seventh Street and West Fifty-eighth Street in which the East River Savings Bank sold the buildings to the Lomas Realty with the stipulation that "the new owner agrees to expend

\$3,000 on repairs and improvements by June 1 next, and December 1, 1934.”¹³ Having spent that money, the first payment on the principal would be due a year later, December 1, 1935.

An article in *Architecture Magazine* from March 1935 references the same principal of financing.

A bank . . . takes over by foreclosure an elevator apartment house built in the days when six to ten room suites were the rule. At that time such suites rented for twenty dollars a room. Now they bring in twelve at most. The bank finds a responsible buyer, who believes that he can fill the building at twenty dollars a room by remodeling it into one to four room suites. The bank puts up dollar for dollar with him to cover the cost of remodeling. Their contribution becomes a building loan mortgage and is later combined with the bank's original mortgage to form a new blanket first mortgage.¹⁴

The writer goes on to point out that usually it is the bank that retains the architect, though it is the buyer who hires the contractor.¹⁵

In “Money for Modernization,” the writer identifies as a new kind of speculator, now found hovering around the alteration and modernization environment. This was “one of the surest signs . . . that the money for modernization can be found in spite of the difficulties.”¹⁶ “While naturally [the speculator] prefers to acquire properties that are now returning an income, he will also become a factor in modernization. . . . He can buy buildings from owners that cannot do the necessary improvements themselves, carry out a remodeling program, and then have a property for a profitable sale when less courageous investors return to the market.”¹⁷

The author quotes these lines from an un-footnoted *New York Times* article:

“Several investors have bought old multi-family buildings in good locations from the banks and have been remodeling the houses, due to the success of other extensive renovation work in the past two years in drawing more tenants and permitting increased prices for the modernized suites.”¹⁸ Another newspaper article that is cited describes eight purchases made by an Isidore Wolff, including a large apartment house on Riverside Drive, most of which are to be remodeled. “So it seems apparent,” the author concludes, “That somebody is going to improve the large number of buildings that are partially or wholly obsolete. The present institutional owners will do it to stop losses or increase sales values. Or they will pass them along to someone else who will.”¹⁹

In 1934, the federal government also stepped in to assist in modernization. The Modernization Credit Plan of the Federal Housing Administration offered homeowners a maximum loan of \$2,000 for repairs and improvements of churches, homes, farm properties, and “certain other types of buildings.”^{20, 21} These small loans were used on apartment buildings, according to a 1934 article entitled “How Building Managers Can Use FHA Modernization Loans,” despite the fact that, as the article put it “A loan of \$2,000 is obviously not sufficient to finance any major alterations or improvements in an office or an apartment building of any considerable size.”²² The article pointed out that this money was sufficient to begin modernization on a “self-liquidating, income-producing plan,” and that the best way to work would be to modernize one apartment at a time, “then, when a tenant is secured for this space, to continue the improvements in the other vacancies, in each case utilizing the income from the modernized space to finance

the additional work. Coupled with aggressive renting efforts this plan can be extremely effective.”²³

In 1935, the amount offered was increased to up to \$50,000 per property and the purposes for which this money could be used was expanded to include modernization equipment with or without structural change. The provision specifically listed apartment house as one of the building types to which this \$50,000 loan guarantee would apply. (Rather than being a direct loan, the federal government actually insured loans made by private institutions that in turn provided the loans to property owners.)²⁴ During the first 21 months of the plan, a total of \$49,544, 979 was borrowed by 101,622 New York City homeowners according to a *New York Times* report published in July 1936.²⁵ Interestingly, it was Brooklyn that led the boroughs in the use of modernization loans, but, the *Times* article points out, that was before the loans were increased from \$2,000 to up to \$50,000.

The FHA Modernization Credit Plan required that interest rates be “reasonable” and in line with local conditions, that borrowers be allowed to take up to five years to begin paying back, to allow “payments from income without interfering with working capital or reserve funds.”²⁶ The FHA administrator who wrote the article in *Buildings and Building Management* argued that these loans were successful overall because workers could get paid upon completion of the work, the building trades and related fields were stimulated, and the bank did not have to fear because its loans were insured.

In December 1936, the *New York Times* reported that the FHA would be wrapping up the modernization program in March 1937. At the time the article was written, modernization loans were “being made at the unprecedented rate of \$5,000,000 a week, and nearly 25 percent of this in the New York City Office.”²⁷

In September 1937, an article in *Buildings and Building Management* reported on another permutation of private financing for apartment modernization. Their report concerned a building on Riverside Drive that had been altered by a group called the 1905 Corporation, a group of business and professional men from the Columbia University Class of 1905, who had met at a class reunion two years earlier and had decided to invest in real estate as a hedge against inflation. Their first investment was 668 Riverside Drive, between 143rd and 144th streets, a building from the early 1900s, which they decided to alter and modernize. Within half a year of beginning their work, they had achieved 95% occupancy (fig. 24).

The article is a detailed study of the work that they did on the building and the financing involved. The corporation purchased the building and the land for \$185,000. When they got the building, each floor had two six-room units, one seven-room unit, and one of eight-rooms. When they were done renovating, the ground floor of the building had two four-room units and seven three-room units, and each floor of the upper five stories had ten four-room units, forty three-room units, and five two-room units—for a total of 64 apartments (fig. 25).²⁸

Most of the renovations at 668 Riverside Drive are similar to those recounted in articles about other buildings. Two of the more novel elements discussed are the “interviewer” on each apartment door and bread boxes that closed automatically.²⁹ The financing appeared equally clever. The corporation financed the purchase and development of 668 Riverside Drive with a \$150,000 first mortgage and a \$90,000 issue of debenture bonds bearing interest at 5%.³⁰ “An unusual move in real estate operation was made in seeking and securing approval of the bond issues by the Securities Exchange Commission, which was done at the suggestion of some legal authorities who were members of the corporation.”

When all was said and done and when they had achieved 100% occupancy, the article estimated that the partners would have earned a total of \$11,548, almost 13% on their investment. It is unknown whether this group went on to do additional buildings together.

In 1939, the largest expenditure as recorded in the alteration applications was an estimate of \$175,000 for D. Everett Waid to subdivide two wings of 790 Riverside Drive. The only comparable expenditure was recorded in 1936 to subdivide apartments at the Dorset at 150 West Seventy-ninth Street (described in Chapter 1), a job that went to a firm that was also many speculative apartment buildings across the city, Boak & Paris. In both cases, the applicants were financial institutions, proving that they had the deepest pockets for this kind of work.

As an article about the renovation of 509 Cathedral Parkway by Emigrant Industrial Savings Bank points out “one reason why the reconstructed buildings pay is that the remodeling is done so thoroughly that the apartments are to all intents new buildings. Tenants are accordingly attracted.”^{31, 32} And as another article entitled “Modernizing Doubled the Value of This Building” put it, “no matter how extensive the remodeling, it is still cheaper than demolishing and rebuilding.”³³

The trade publications, however, likely did not represent the voices of some of the smaller owners who are listed in the apartment alteration applications, people who needed the income on their properties but didn’t have millions to invest in order to make their properties attractive once again. The fact that there were a small number of applications with no architect listed, and others with architects who were lesser known could imply an attempt to spend as little money as possible. Presumably, some of the smaller owners may also have done some of the renovations themselves or with the help of family members, rather than by hiring outside contractors. That would be one explanation for some of the extraordinarily small estimated amounts on the applications: at 1452 First Avenue, \$1000 to create two apartments from one on floors two through four, and add kitchens; or \$600 on Hamilton Terrace to rearrange the seven-room apartments on floors two to six, into two three-room apartments per floor.³⁴

Out of 196 applications filed during this decade, only 27 applications were filed by large institutions: banks, insurance companies, and Columbia University. Although the large entities seemed to offer less information about what they were planning to do than

the smaller operators, their plans and modernization histories are chronicled in the trade publications of the day. The stories of the smaller operators, how they paid for modernization, and whether or not it ultimately served their interests well may exist in family oral histories or written journals, but it would require a far more extensive effort than was made in this research to uncover it.

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 3. Benjamin F. Betts, "A.I.A. Modernization Shows would Stimulate Business," *American Architect* 42, no. 2609 (July 1932): 13.
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 13. Anonymous, "The Money for Modernization," *Buildings and Building Management* 34, no. 2 (January 16, 1934): 13.
 14. Morgan Farrell, "Rebuilding New York Apartments," *Architecture* 71, no. 3 (March 1935): 121.
 15. Ibid., 121.
 16. Ibid., 11.
 17. Ibid., 11.
 18. Ibid., 11.
 19. Ibid., 11.

20. Robert B. Smith, "FHA Credit Plan Releases Funds for Modernizing," *Buildings and Building Modernization* 34 (January 16, 1936): 8. Smith was himself the assistant to the administrator of the Federal Housing Administration, according to a footnote in the article.

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22. Anonymous, "How Building Managers Can Use FHA Modernization Loans," *Buildings and Building Management* 34, no. 11 (October 1934): 23.

23. *Ibid.*, 23–24.

24. Smith, "FHA Credit Plan," 8.

25. Anonymous, "\$49,544,000 Loaned for New York Repairs," *New York Times*, July 19, 1936, Real Estate section.

26. Smith, "FHA Credit Plan," 8.

27. Anonymous, "FHA Loans Sought on Big Dwellings," *New York Times*, December 1, 1936, 9.

28. Anonymous, "Apartment Modernization on an Investment Basis," *Buildings and Building Modernization* 37, no. 9 (September 1937): 51.

29. *Ibid.*, 51.

30. Debenture bonds offer a fixed rate of interest with priority over dividend payments.

31. According to the *Real Estate Record*, between 1931 and 1936, the date of the article, Emigrant Industrial Savings Bank invested \$5 million in the alteration of a thousand old buildings acquired through foreclosure since 1931.

32. Norbert Brown, "The Economics of Building Modernization," *Real Estate Record* 137, no. 16 (April 18 1936): 26.

33. Anonymous, "Modernizing Doubled the Value of this Building," *Buildings and Building Management* 34, no. 1 (January 16, 1934): 10.

34. New York City Buildings Department, Docket Books, application number 3651. November 23, 1936 (New York City Municipal Archives). Application for 1452 First Avenue, \$1000 to create two apartments from one on floors two through four, and add kitchens.

New York City Buildings Department, Docket Books, application number 1699. June 5, 1936 (New York City Municipal Archives). Application for Hamilton Terrace, \$600 to rearrange the seven-room apartments on floors two to six into two three-room apartments per floor.

Chapter 7: Pre-wars

In 2007, Columbia University was reported to be researching how to recombine some of its Morningside Heights apartments to make them suitable for occupation by deans and other high-level employees.¹ Seventy years after the grand spaces were broken up, fashions have changed, and butlers' pantries and long hallways between rooms have regained their former appeal. What were once deemed excessively large suites are now desirable.

The apartments that were built before World War One have become indistinguishable to the average broker or consumer from those built between the two world wars. Whether or not an apartment was altered during the 1930s is not part of public or industry discussion. The term "pre-war" apartment has become common parlance in New York, but it lumps together the altered, the unaltered, and those built in the late 1930s.

Ironically, in the real estate boom of the 1980s, "pre-war" came to be associated with space and quality. "Sprawling pre-war apartments" is a term found in a display ad from 1987.² "Solid prewar apartments" associates thick plaster walls with pre-war apartments in contrast to the less substantial walls of plaster board found in buildings dating from the 1960s and after.³

Pre-wars are most commonly found in the neighborhoods that also saw the most alterations: the Upper West Side, Morningside Heights, and Washington Heights. There are pre-wars on the east side, too, probably percentage-wise a greater number of post-war buildings on the east side, particularly east of Lexington Avenue. Curiously, the greatest challenge to the appeal of pre-war over post-war apartments (often derogatorily referred to as “shoe boxes” for their small and monotonous layouts and lack of internal detail) is the recent trend toward selling a building by using the name of the architect. A Robert A. M. Stern or a Richard Meier building has enough name appeal to certain consumers to make the lack of pre-war detail less important. And the pre-war market never counters that pitch by using pre-war architects’ names. With a few exceptions such as Rosario Candela, most renters and buyers don’t go out of their way to live in buildings by Schwartz & Gross or George Pelham, two of the names associated with pre-World War One architecture.

The alteration wave then is largely forgotten. It served its purpose. It offered the market a greater supply of lower-priced apartments that cash-strapped renters could afford. The fact that these apartments were smaller was often a relief as it meant less upkeep in a time when people could not afford or rely upon the luxury of servants. For the landlords, the greater number of cheaper rentals increased the overall yield and their ability to pay their mortgages and not default. And for the architects and the people in the building trades, the alteration wave provided much-needed employment. This employment allowed them to be consumers, to spend money and thereby contribute to the health of the economy. The banks that acted as the agents of alteration also benefited, as

the new kitchens and smaller spaces were often enough improvement to turn a white elephant into a profitable property and a source of mortgage income.

The buildings themselves also benefited since many of the alterations included mechanical upgrades as well as improvements in fire-safety and other features. Many landlords may not have spent the money to make those upgrades if they had not been driven by necessity. Many landlords would also not spend again in the same way, in the decades that followed the 1930s. When many pre-war buildings became cooperatives in the 1980s, the new resident owners found themselves saddled with years of neglect, in some cases, finding that certain systems had not been upgraded since the alteration days of the 1930s.⁴

For architectural historians, the alteration wave insured that these pre–World War One buildings weren’t ripped down, as they might have been had there been more money around in the 1930s. Even though the interiors of New York’s first apartment buildings are no longer intact, their exteriors remain, preserving the original streetscapes in many neighborhoods. And the features in bathrooms and kitchens in those altered apartments, particularly those that still remain rental, to this day offer a glimpse into desirable features of the 1930s, such as built-in laundry bins and metal kitchen cabinets.

These changes have been largely forgotten perhaps because the alterations were never really advertised at the time they were being executed in the 1930s. Smaller suites were marketed for their size, but nothing was said about how it was that they became

smaller, or why the latest kitchens now could be found in 30-year-old buildings. No catchy jingles or memorable billboards advertising alteration tickled the public imagination enough to make this trend be remembered years later.

As the 1930s drew to a close and a second economic downturn occurred, there was speculation as to what the future real estate market of the city was likely to look like. Clarke G. Dailey, president of the Real Estate Board of New York, a key industry organization, delivered a lecture as part of a course at the New York YMCA School. It was later published in part in *Real Estate and Building Management Digest* in October 1937.⁵

Dailey drew on the biblical story of Joseph's dream of seven fat and seven lean years to try to predict the future of the New York market. In his experience, Dailey said, there are usually four or five years of "precipitate decline, and 13 or 14 years of gradual improvement."⁶ According to Dailey, the declining years began in 1930, and the gradual improvement started in 1935, when "realty values began the long climb back toward the peak." He predicted that the peak would occur in 1948.

Obviously what Dailey could not have predicted was America's involvement in what became known as World War Two, and the impact of the war on the American economy, both good and bad. He also could not have predicted the important effect that returning soldiers at the end of the war would have on the market, or the baby boom that followed their return, which tipped the balance between urban and suburban living,

causing many families to leave those neighborhoods of altered pre–World War One neighborhoods in favor of the suburbs.

As the alteration and modernization wave fades farther into the past, it takes its place among the hidden elements of the New York built environment. It is the kind of secret that might only be revealed to a wider audience when a source such as the “Q and A’s” or the “Streetscape” columns in the *New York Times* Sunday Real Estate section devotes a few paragraphs to it, causing a short-lived flurry of interest. It was a practical solution to a particularly difficult problem. It left its mark, but it was superceded by other trends and largely forgotten.

1. Patricia Renfro, Deputy Librarian, in discussion with the author, May 20, 2007.

2. Display ad 244, *New York Times*, May 31, 1987, Real Estate section.

3. Philip S. Gutis, “Renovating in an Old Area,” *New York Times*, May 30, 1986, Section A.

4. 790 Riverside Drive found in 2005, when its gas risers failed, that only the apartments that were in the wings that were renovated in 1938 had individual gas lines leading to the apartments. The lines in the rest of the building were conjoined as they had been in the entire building when it was built in 1910.

5. Clarke G. Dailey, “The Future of Manhattan Realty,” *Real Estate and Building Management Digest* 26, no. 10 (October 1937): 4.

6. *Ibid.*, 4.

Appendix A: Images

Introduction

Figure 1

Chapter 1

Figures 2, 3, 4, 5

Chapter 2

Figure 6

Chapter 3

Figures 7, 8, 9

Chapter 4

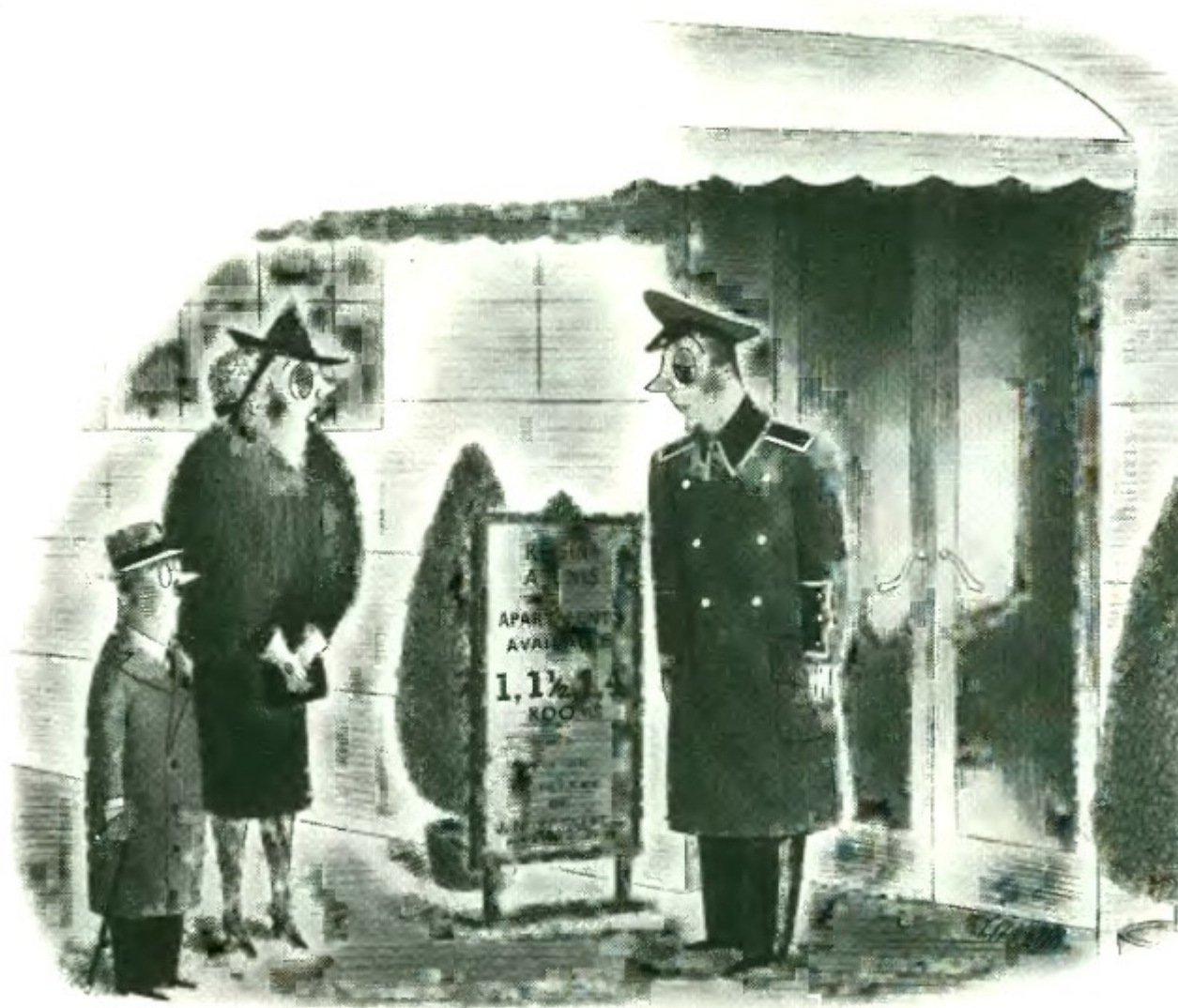
Figure 10

Chapter 5

Figures 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 21, 22, 23

Chapter 6

Figures 24, 25



"We'd like to look at your one-and-a-half-room apartments."

Figure 1. *New Yorker* cartoon from 1939 addressing the trend of wealthy New Yorkers living in small apartments. (Introduction)

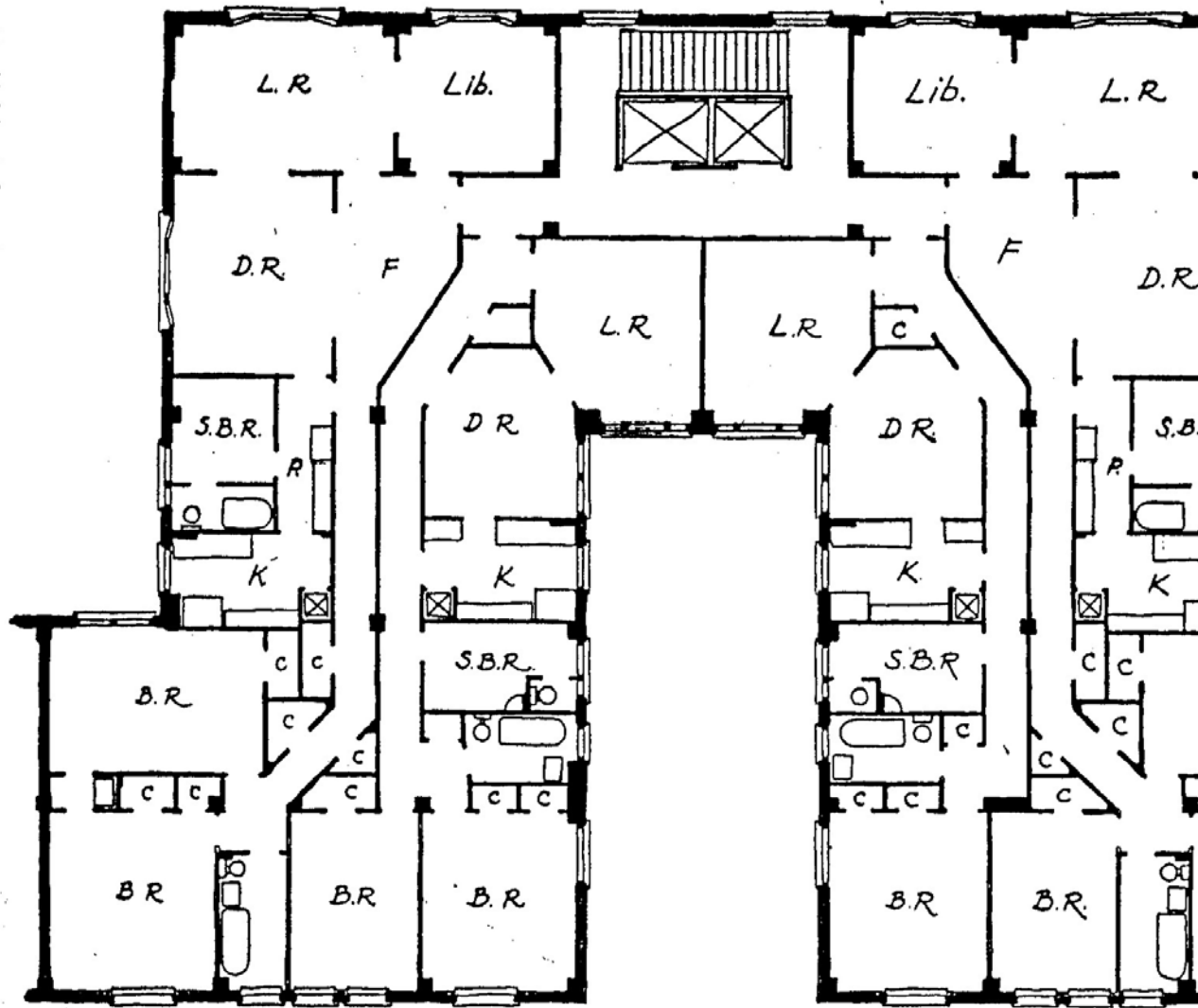


Figure 2. Original floor plan of 509 Cathedral Parkway on 110th Street between Broadway and Amsterdam Avenue. (Chapter 1)

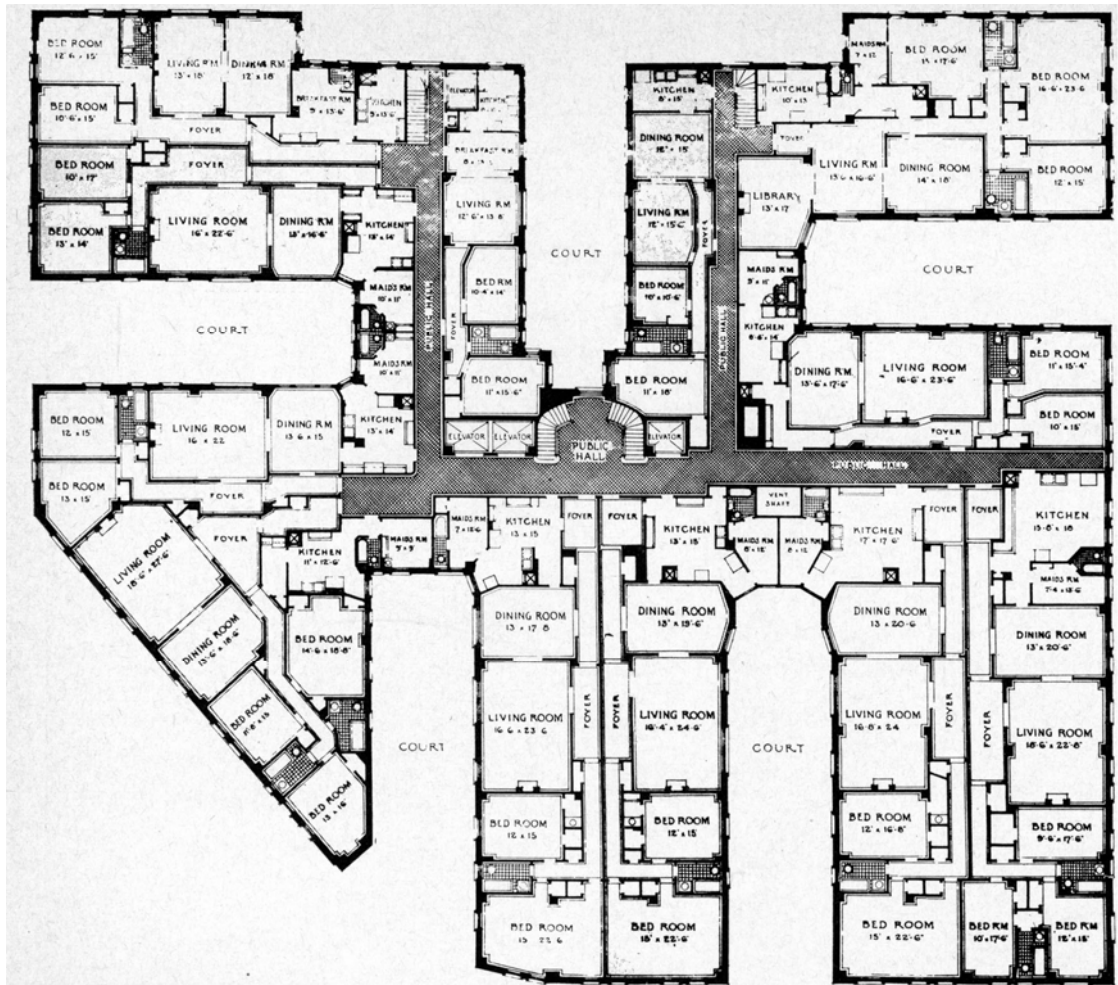
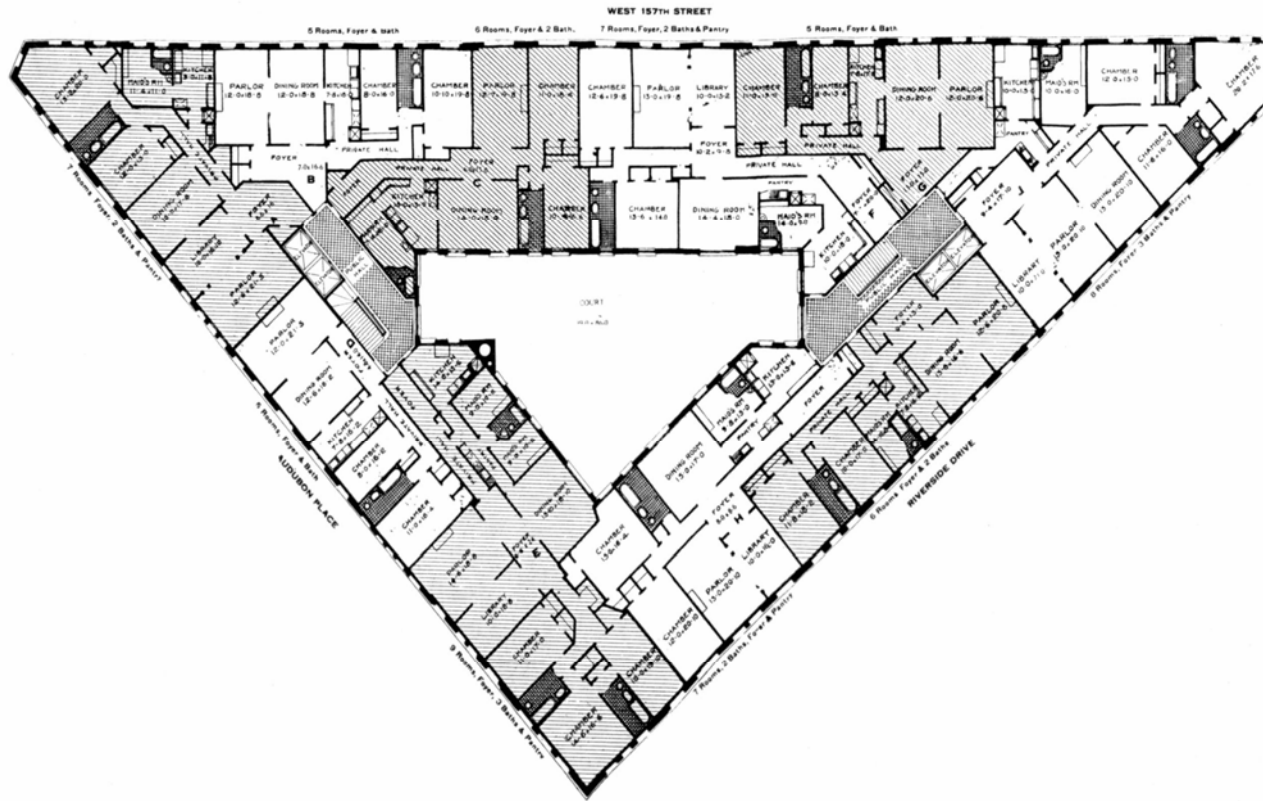


Figure 3. Original floor plan of 790 Riverside Drive at 157th Street. (Chapter 1)



TYPICAL FLOOR PLAN OF THE GRINNELL.

Figure 4. Floor plan of 800 Riverside Drive, The Grinnell. (Chapter 1)

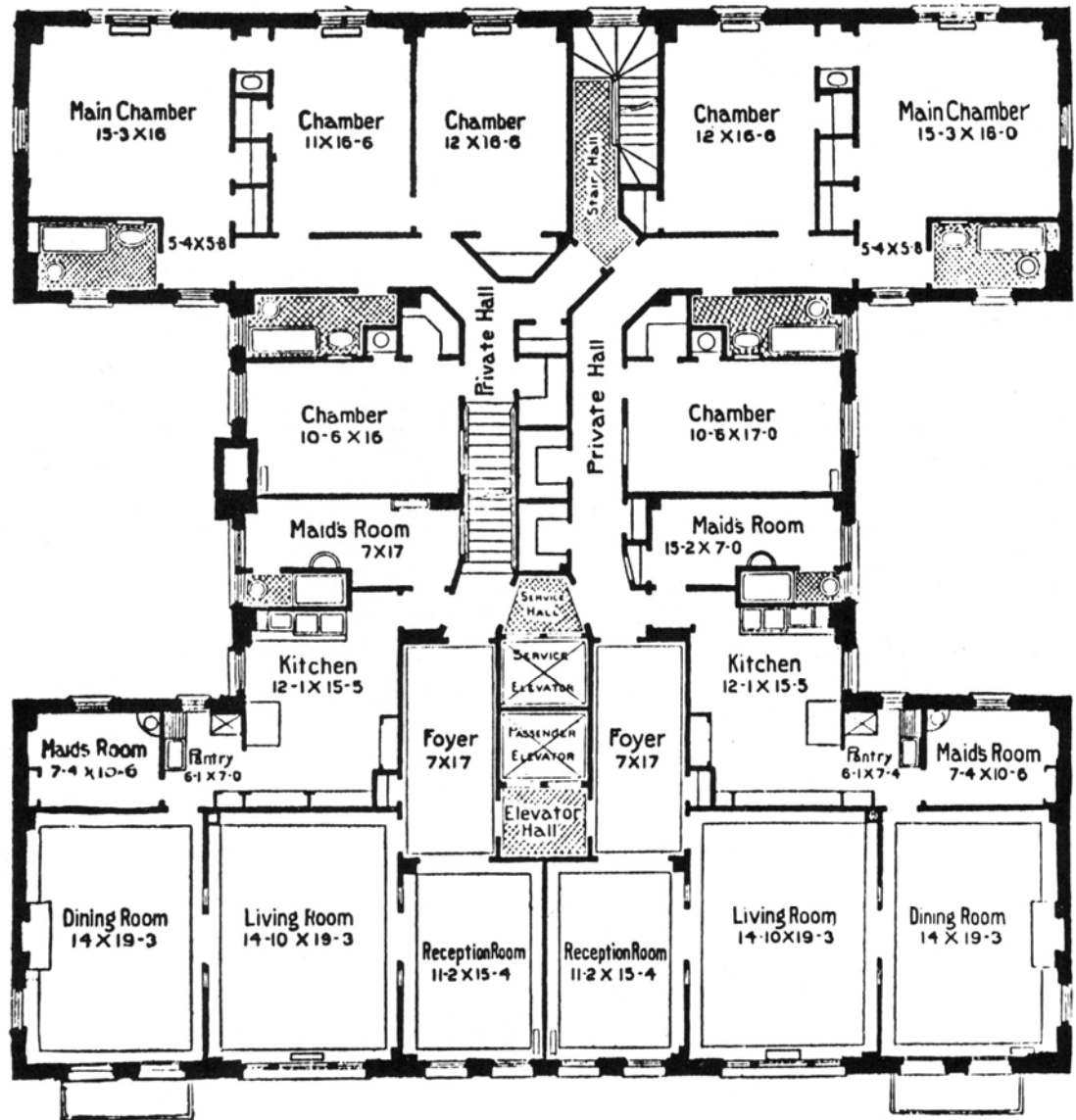


Figure 6. Original floor plan of The Dorset, 150 West Seventy-ninth Street.
(Chapter 2)



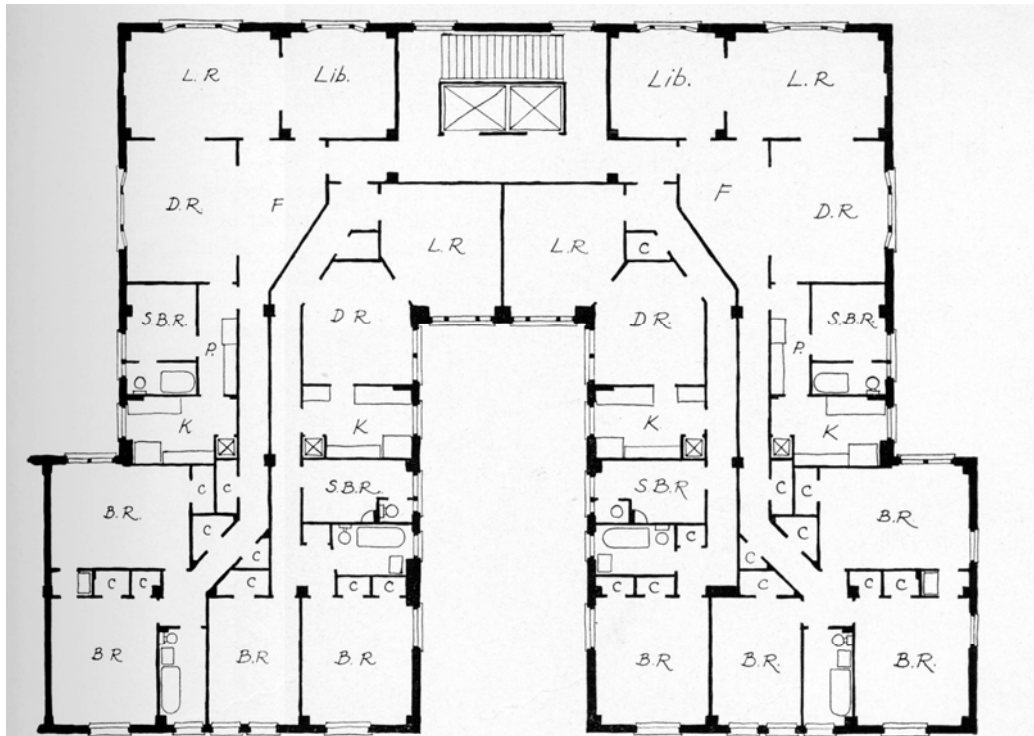
Fifteen Years of Leadership in Modernizing Buildings

Long before the word modernization came into popular usage, *BUILDINGS AND BUILDING MANAGEMENT* was strongly advocating the remodeling and rehabilitating of old office and apartment buildings to prolong their economic life and increase their earnings. This reproduction shows just a few of the many pages which have, particularly during the last 15 years, urged the wisdom of keeping aging buildings young through judicious improvements. The soundness of this editorial policy, and in part the result of these efforts, is evident in the present recognition of modernization as an economic necessity.

BUILDINGS AND BUILDING MANAGEMENT—January 16, 1934

31

Figure 7. The journal *Buildings and Building Management* was a constant promoter of building modernization as shown in this graphic from a 1934 issue. (Chapter 2)



Here is one of the better elevator apartments on the upper West Side, its suites of seven, eight, and nine rooms once in great demand. Its modernization necessitated practically the entire rebuilding of the interior, with the typical floor divided as below. Voorhees, Gmelin & Walker were the architects

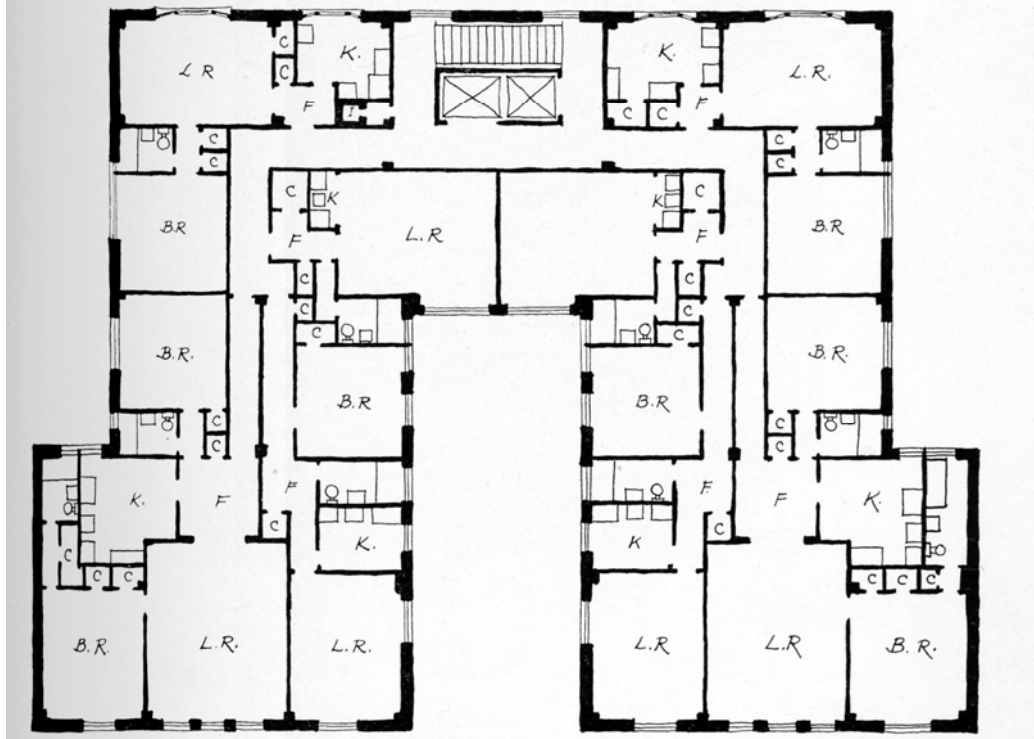


Figure 8. 509 Cathedral Parkway (at 110th Street) floor plans before and after alteration. (Chapter 3)

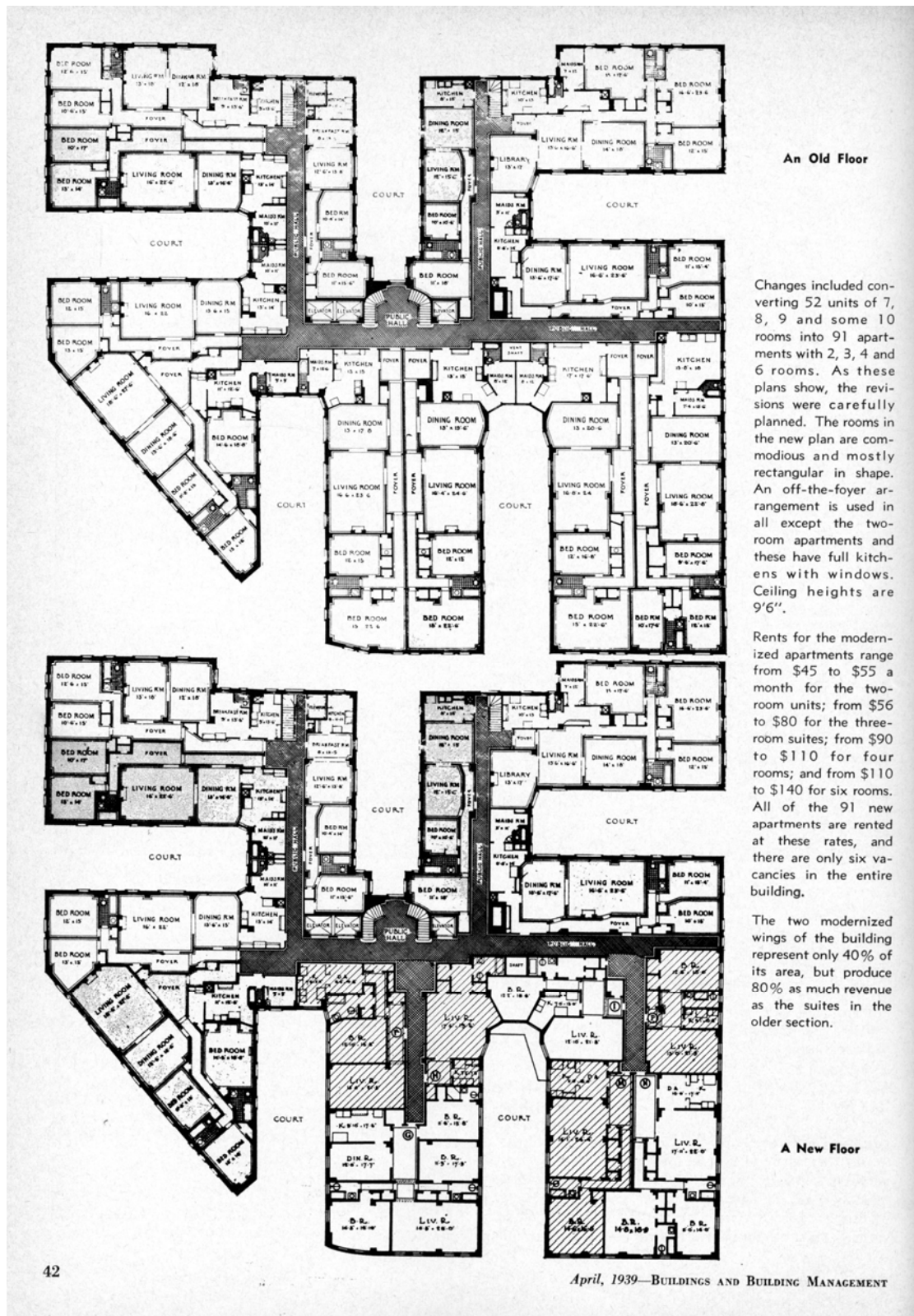


Figure 9. Before-and-after alteration as seen in floor plans from 790 Riverside Drive at 157th Street. (Chapter 3)

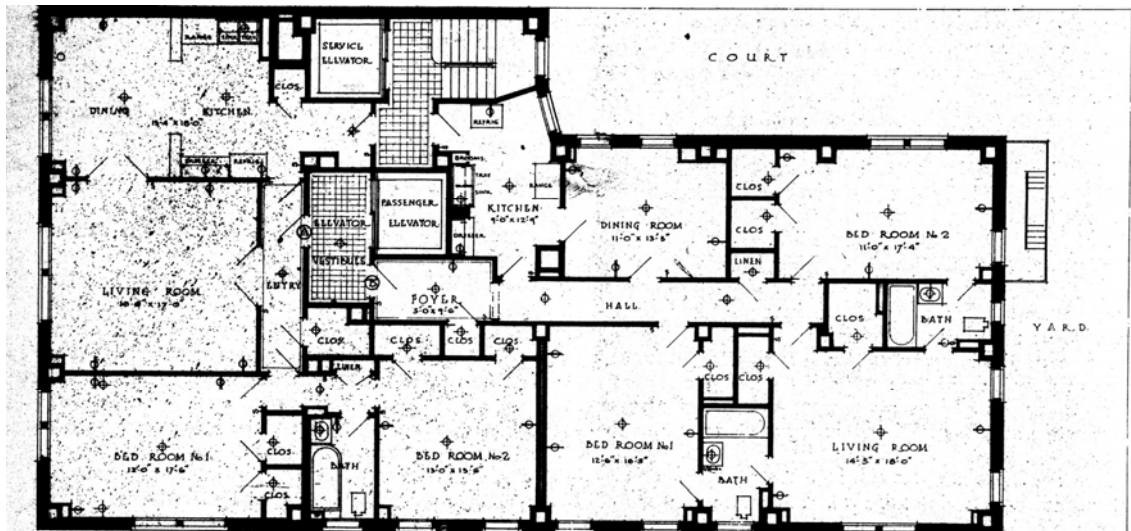


Typical Floor Plan, 1925



617 West End Avenue, New York City

A particularly interesting aspect of these contrasting before-and-after floor plans of the 15-story apartment building at 617 West End Avenue, New York City, is the change in their presentation. The original 1925 layout of one ten-room apartment to a floor was presented vertically, as the plan shows. The revised layout of two five-room apartments to a floor is presented horizontally, thus neatly obviating any possible feeling that one of the apartments is in the rear of the other. The building is, of course, on a corner



Revamped floor plan, after two-for-one subdividing, 1938

Figure 10. 617 West End Avenue, before and after alteration. (Chapter 3)

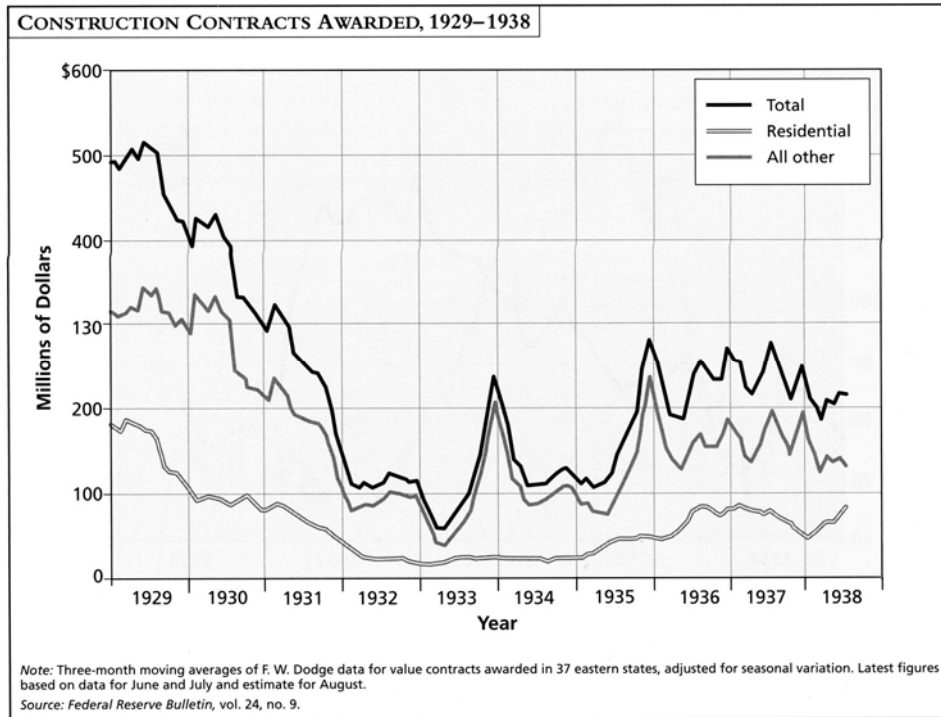


Figure 11. Construction graphic, demonstrating that the worst years for new residential construction were between 1932 and early 1935. (Chapter 4)

APARTMENT 100% RENTED ... APPLICANTS WAITING!

READ HOW THIS OPERATOR DID IT . . .

LOUIS GRETSCH
REAL ESTATE
11 COURT STREET
BROOKLYN, N. Y.
PHONE 210 TWAINALE

December 9, 1932

Brooklyn Union Gas Company,
136 Remsen Street,
Brooklyn, New York

Attention - Mr. McDonough:

Gentlemen: We take great pleasure in announcing that our building at 4209 Prospect Place, Brooklyn, is fully rented. There are twenty-nine apartments in all, and strange as it may seem we have several applicants waiting for an apartment should a vacancy occur.

When we assumed the management of this building last February, our analysis showed the vacancies and loss of rent for the period of a year amounted to 17%. We decided the main cause for this tremendous loss was the so-called Electric Refrigeration.

We promised the tenants we would install ELECTROLUX Refrigerators. The result speaks for itself, which is phenomenal. Instead of reducing rents to accomplish this result our annual rent compared to what it was when we assumed the Management has been increased Seven Hundred and Sixty-eight Dollars per year. The tenants are delighted with the performance of these machines. We have had no complaint whatever from any tenant for a service call. We are using three other makes of well known refrigeration in houses we have under management but none compare with results produced by the ELECTROLUX.

Very truly yours,

Louis Gretsch



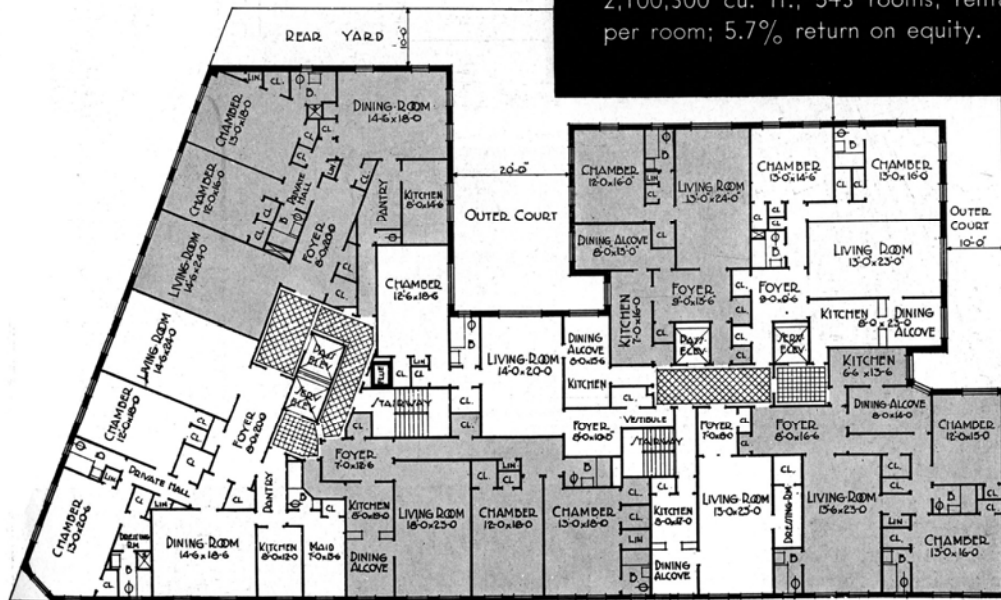
A tiny gas flame
makes constant, steady cold

OWNERS and managers of apartments are giving more and more attention to the type of automatic refrigeration they install. People are demanding automatic refrigeration but it must be economical, silent, and trouble-free. Investigate Electrolux if you are building or modernizing an apartment. See your local gas company or write to Electrolux Refrigerator Sales, Inc., Evansville, Ind.

ELECTROLUX
THE *Gas* REFRIGERATOR

Figure 12. Brooklyn gas ad attributes occupancy rates to modernizations with their newest appliances. (Chapter 4)

A renting specialist recommended large suites with large rooms.
2,100,300 cu. ft.; 543 rooms; rental \$500 per room; 5.7% return on equity.



Ducat 89

LARGER ROOMS

Higher rentals, larger rooms and fewer suites proved a fallacy.

2,138,500 cu. ft.; 505 rooms; rental \$550 per room; 6.2% return on equity.

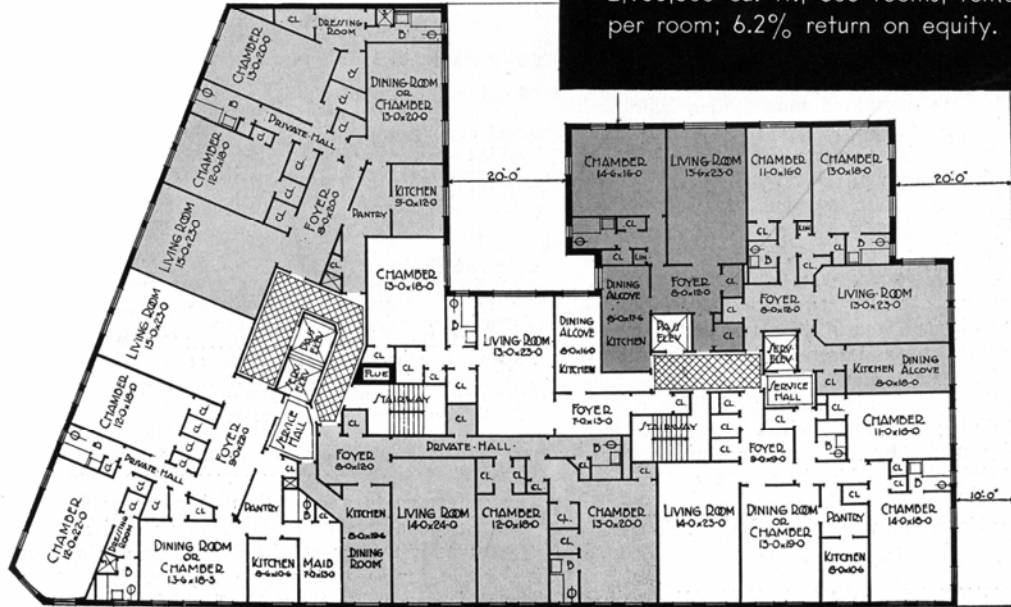
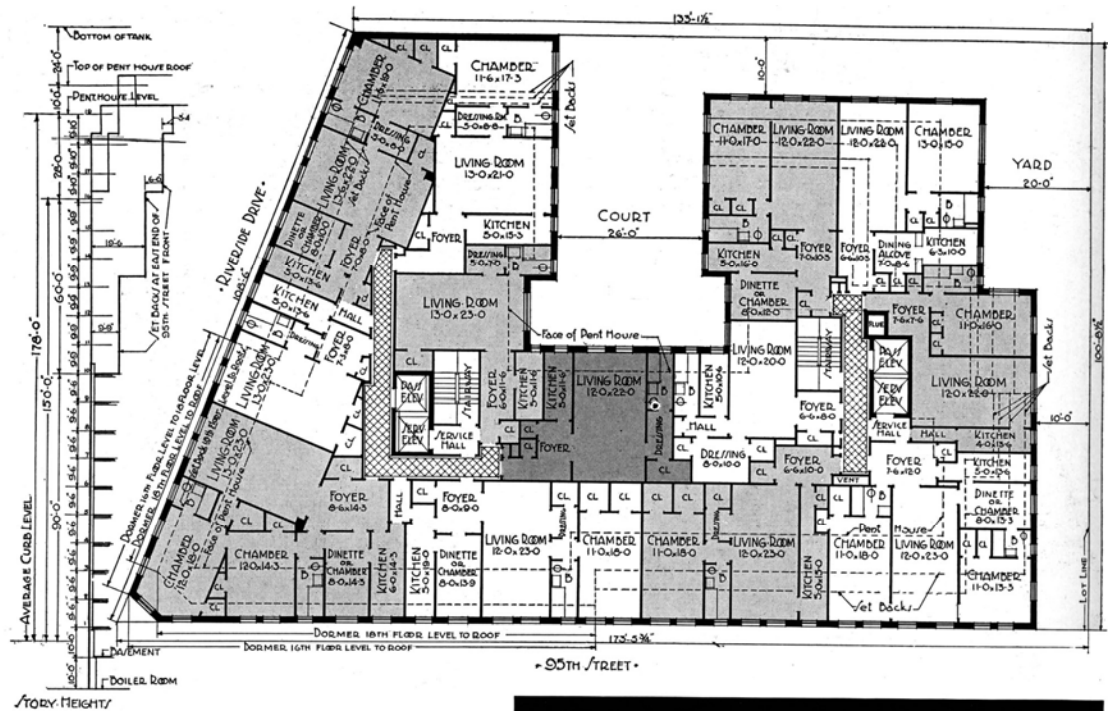


FIGURE 3

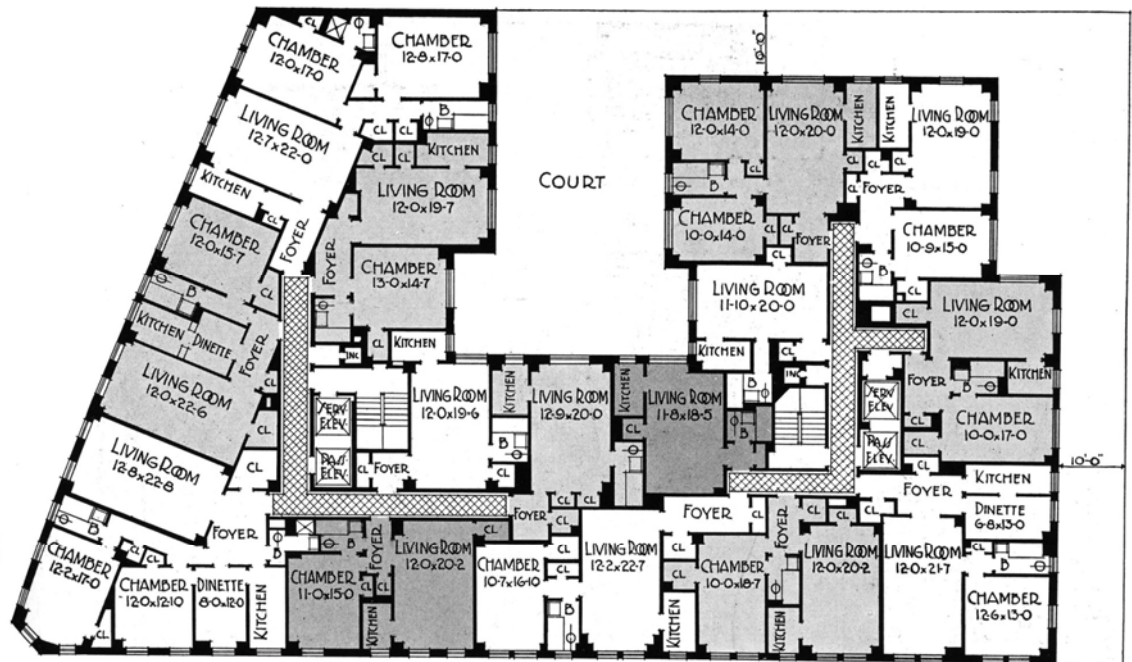
Figure 14. Professor Lench adjusted his model for the new building on Riverside Drive based on further advice from the “renting specialists.” (Chapter 5)



SMALLER SUITES

This plan sold the land, the promoters taking it to an owner-builder who arranged the necessary financing. Depressed business conditions suggested still smaller suites. 2,175,000 cu. ft.; 697 rooms; rental \$500 per room; 15% return on equity.

Figure 15. After Charles Lench began to follow his own instincts about decreasing the size of the apartments for the Riverside Drive and Ninety-fifth Street building, the income calculations began to make more sense. (Chapter 5)



SMALLER ROOMS

Smaller rooms provide for two more apartments on each floor and permit reduction in rental, thereby adding still further to the safety of the owner's cash investment. 2,175,000 cu. ft.; 780 rooms; rental \$450 per room; 15% return on equity.

Figure 16. The callout box from the article by Charles Lench that outlined his ultimate plan for the new building on Riverside Drive and Ninety-fifth Street. (Chapter 5)

Modern Gas Ranges

*that take down the
"vacancies" sign*

This illustration shows one of the Modern Gas Ranges now available at exceptionally low prices. See these attractive ranges at the showroom of your dealer or your Gas Company.



HERE is a way to avoid the concession as a means of renting apartments—a way that improves the property and builds tenant satisfaction: install modern gas ranges and gas refrigerators in your kitchens.

Today's gas ranges, equipped with efficient insulation and oven control, are priced at surprisingly low figures. In fact they cost as little as ordinary "replacement" ranges in 1931, without these modern features. Not only are these 1932 gas ranges lower priced. They are better looking and more convenient than the cooking equipment of a

Every one of these moderate-priced modern gas appliances bears the Seal of Approval of the American Gas Association.

year ago. They make a modern apartment kitchen look its best, and in these days of maidless households, the kitchen may well be the deciding point in the selection of an apartment.

Visit the showroom of your Gas Company—or that of your nearest gas appliance dealer. Seeing the attractive colors, exceptional convenience, and modern designs of these present day ranges will convince you of the soundness of the advice:

Modernize With Modern Gas Appliances

CONSOLIDATED GAS COMPANY OF NEW YORK

FOUR IRVING PLACE, STUYVESANT 9-4900

RECORD AND GUIDE 27

Figure 17. One solution to the vacancy problem was the installation of new kitchen appliances according to an advertisement in a magazine aimed at real estate professionals. (Chapter 5)



General Electric Co.

A Modern Electric Kitchen

This all-electrically equipped kitchen illustrates a complete installation of the equipment that will gain the favor of prospective women tenants and aid in keeping down the vacancies. If it is not feasible to make complete installations immediately, the equipment is designed for piecemeal installation

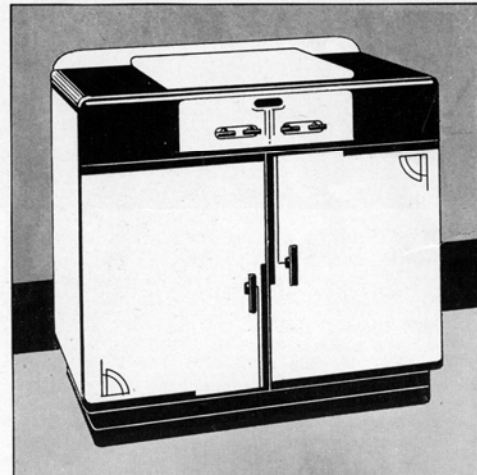
Figure 18. During the 1930s, all-electric kitchens were promoted to building managers as a feature that was sure to attract renters. (Chapter 5)



HOW TO PREVENT A TENANT SHORTAGE

INTO the kitchen of every one of your vacant apartments, place two new appliances; a modern air-cooled gas refrigerator, and an up-to-date gas range. Both are so good looking they'll make the neatest of kitchens look more attractive. Both hold such promise of easy housekeeping that women want to begin enjoying them right away.

Many apartment house managers don't wait for vacancies. They put in modern gas appliances anyway—and find, as a direct result, that renewals are readily signed. Right now you'll find some exceptionally good buys in gas ranges and gas refrigerators at your gas appliance dealer's, or your Gas Company showroom. Better see them—today.



This insulated and heat-controlled oven, table-top gas range, available in a choice of colors, is ideal for apartment installation.

Price \$43.89.* Price semi-insulated without heat control \$34.65.*

*Prices quoted are subject to City 2% Sales Tax for Relief of Unemployed

*Be sure the gas appliances you buy carry the Blue Star
Seal of the American Gas Association Laboratory.*



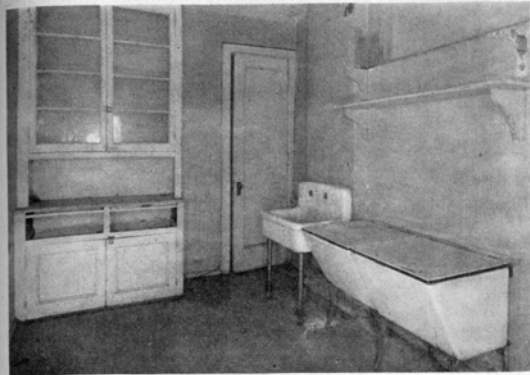
CONSOLIDATED GAS COMPANY OF NEW YORK

Four Irving Place

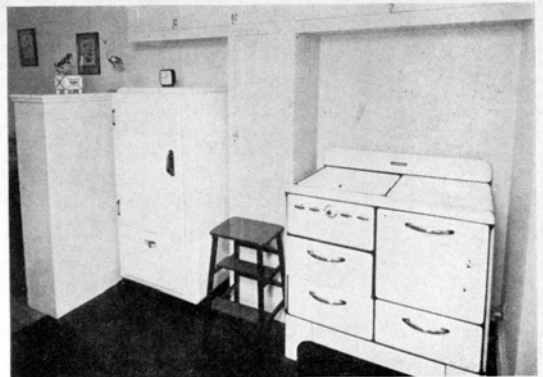
STuyvesant 9-4900

REAL ESTATE RECORD ★ OCTOBER 19, 1935

Figure 19. Advertisement from a trade publication correlating the installation of new appliances with vacancy prevention. (Chapter 5)



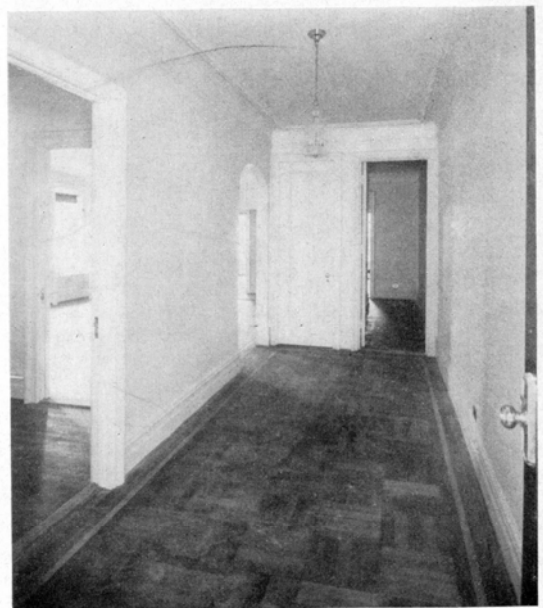
An old kitchen—



and a new one



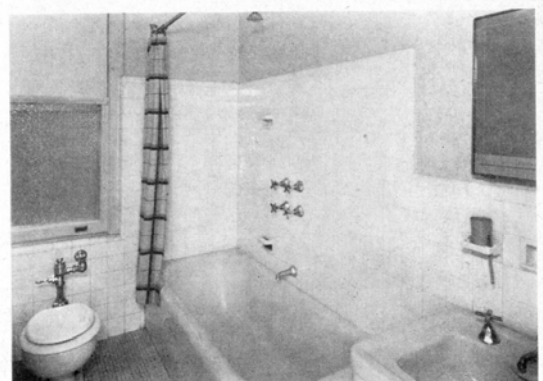
Typical long, narrow hall—



and its modernized counterpart



An old style bathroom—

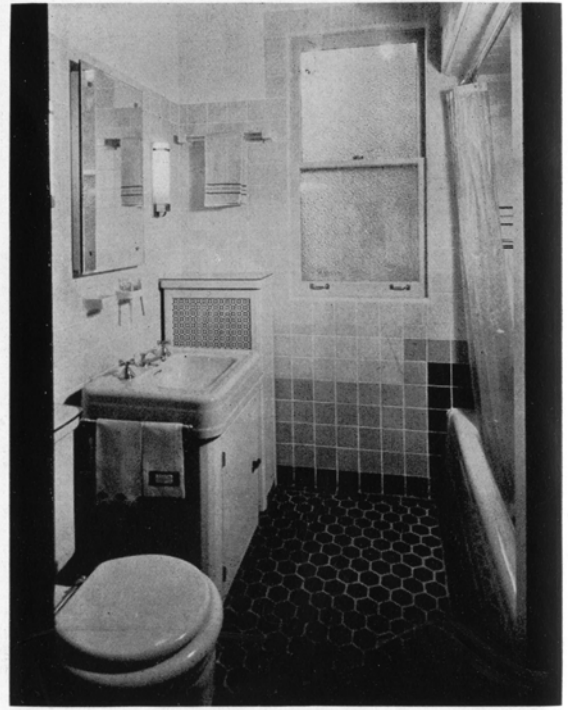


and its attractive successor

Figure 20. Features of 790 Riverside Drive, before and after alteration. (Chapter 5)



Before



After

Figure 21. A bathroom before and after renovation, from a real estate trade publication from the 1930s. (Chapter 5)



Figure 22. A modern bathroom from the late 1930s. (Chapter 5)

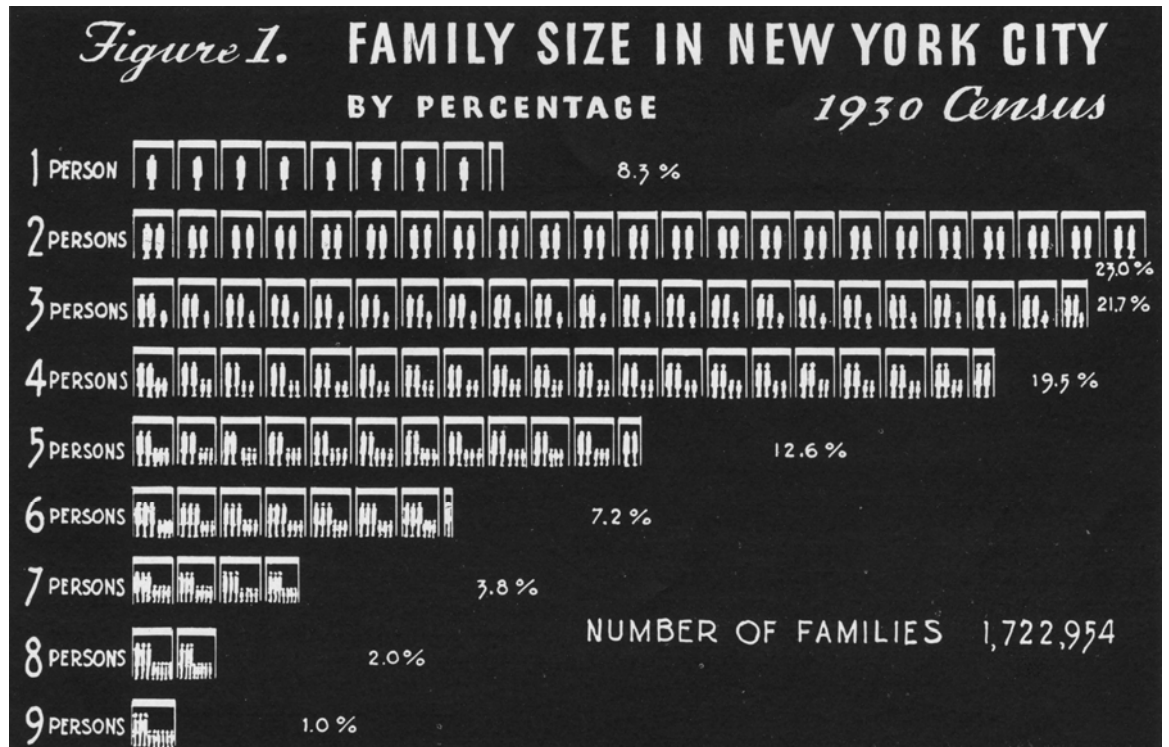


Figure 23. Graphic illustrating declining family size, a reason given for the trend toward smaller apartments in Manhattan during the 1930s. (Chapter 5)



After complete interior reconstruction, this New York apartment building pays its new owners 13% on their investment

Figure 24. The exterior of 668 Riverside Drive purchased by the 1905 Corporation.
(Chapter 6)

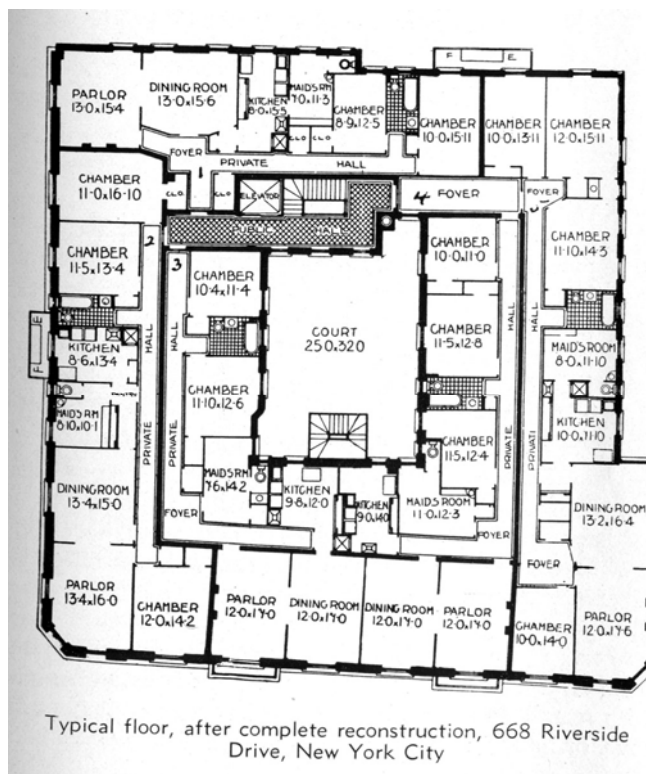
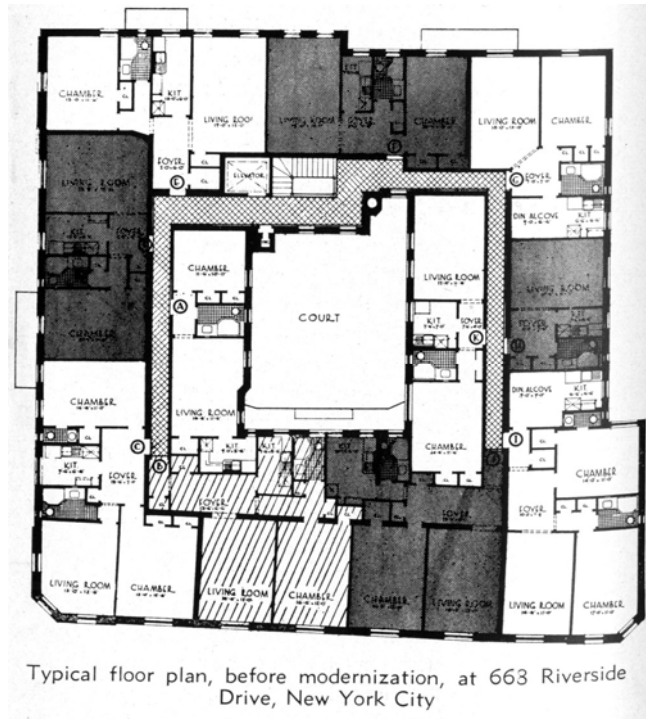


Figure 25. 668 Riverside Drive, before and after alteration by the 1905 Corporation. (Chapter 6)

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